

Greetings Environment and Transportation Committee and thank you for reading my testimony. My name is Joseph Weeks, I am a tenant and resident in Baltimore City, and I am urging the committee to return a favorable report on bill HB0477 / SB0644. To say it in brief, my experience of being forced out of my home of 7 years was extremely violent and changed my life in unforeseen and extremely negative ways

The way Chasen group relayed the lease termination to their new tenants was subhuman at best: In December of 2022, I, along with over 18 other residents of my building (1720 Saint Paul street), were notified of new building owners purchasing our home. We were promised the new owners - Chasen Group - would like to have us as continued residents, but instead, they gave every resident in the building **less than 30** days to vacate. We were residents who had paid rent on time, without issue, without any write ups or or failure to pay rent proceedings, and they still were able to give us minimal notice like this.

After the purchase our rent went up immediately with no notice, and that was just a small sign of what was to come. Chasen group told us that if we wanted to stay, we would still have to move out for at least two months, reapply, pay a new \$75 application fee, and then pay new, greatly increased rent on our current apartments. Almost immediately my life was put into a state of chaos. A close friend had just died and I was dealing with that while trying to handle working full time, and this led to a situation where I couldn't pack and ended up losing the majority of my belongings. I had to throw away most of my things in order to get out of the building I'd called home for 7 years in a timely manner. None of my neighbors were prepared for this life changing process and many experienced similar issues. I personally looked at at least five apartments over three weeks before giving up and having to move back home because I couldn't afford the rent and application fees and had no time to make other arrangements. I now live with my parents an hour outside of the city. Many of my neighbors also struggled with finding affordable housing, and several moved to entirely different states.

There were disabled folks in this building, there were elderly in this building, many of us are LGBTQIA, many of us work in food & beverage while also wearing many hats professionally to pursue a career in the arts. Harm reductionists lived in this building, helping to get free HIV testing Baltimore city residents, as well as free mental health resources. These individuals (myself included) have contributed to a cultural enrichment that is dying by the droves since the cost of living and buyouts and lease terminations like this have driven many of us out of Baltimore's neighborhoods. The cultural cost of the destruction and scattering of our community and the resources we provide is immeasurable.

All of this could've been avoided, if there were some law in place to efficiently protect renters in Baltimore city from lease terminations like this based solely on landlords wanting up the rent. We fought back as a group and managed to win many tenants two months to relocate instead of the less than one month originally offered. Unfortunately, and quite disgustingly, we were forced to endure heavy renovations while Chasen Group illegally forced us out of our homes. Heavy sanding, painting abandoned apartments and hallways with heavy, heavy, fumes that made several tenants sick, constant noise starting very early in the morning, their workers staying in those abandoned apartments overnight, smoking inside of them, trying to break into our apartments... Many unpleasant experiences were had, there was no one to report to who actually responded to our complaints. It is clear that Chasen group saw this as acceptable and saw us as disposable. I felt we were treated more like animals than people.

Chasen group is owned by Brandon Chasen, and is known for buyouts and rapid, often illegally short-notice, lease terminations and evictions of this type. They view real estate as a vehicle for profit and see tenants living in these properties as an unfortunate side effect. We have to demand more from landlords and protect tenants better, or more will be harmed the way my neighbors and I were. By not implementing Just Cause protections, this committee will essentially be facilitating the bad behavior of Brandon Chasen and landlords like him and their exploitation of tenants. We need great efforts in place to protect the future of Baltimore city and the people who make it a wonderful place to live. Just cause not only protects tenants, it protects communities and cultures.

Thank you,
Joseph Weeks