

Date of Hearing: February 13, 2024

Charles M. Koplik, Odenton, Maryland 21113

TESTIMONY ON HB0477- POSITION: FAVORABLE
**Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local
Just Cause Termination Provisions**

TO: Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Charles M. Koplik

My name is Charles M. Koplik. I am a resident of District 21. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0477, Just Cause Termination.

I am a member of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Howard County and chair its Anti-Racism Team. In addition, I serve as Vice Chair of the Jewish Federation of Howard County, and I am a member of Temple Isaiah of Fulton. I am also on the board of PATH (People Acting Together in Howard County), an organization of faith communities working together on social justice issues.

I was at the statehouse yesterday with PATH, lobbying for this legislation and our group included renters who were desperately worried about their security and the risk of eviction for no or little cause. You need to hear their stories and be responsible for their needs just as you look after the needs of landlords. Ancient Jewish texts say – “Those who lie in bed at night planning iniquity and designing evil...covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away. They defraud a person of their home; a person of their inheritance” — Micah 2: 1-3. The prophet Micah understood that housing is more than a roof over one’s head and that to deny a person safe housing is not only robbing them in the present but also robbing their family for generations to come.

Maryland has the highest rate of evictions of any US state bar none. That’s not a statistic to be proud of. In 2018, Maryland’s eviction filing rate was 69.6% – an extreme outlier rate compared to the national average of nearly 8% (Estimating Eviction Prevalence Across the United States, Ashley Gromis, Ian Fellows, James R. Hendrickson and Matthew Desmond).

Landlords often retaliate against tenants who organize for their rights, demand that repairs be made, or complain about violations of laws about safe housing conditions. Sometimes this retaliation takes the form of refusing to renew their leases. “Just cause” laws protect tenants from this kind of retaliation, and from being evicted for no reason at all. These laws promote housing stability for tenants and neighborhoods.

This bill would allow counties to adopt “just cause” laws that meet local needs to require landlords to renew residential leases unless they have a “just cause” to terminate the lease such as wanting to occupy the property themselves, having a close relative move in, taking the property off the market, and tenant breach of lease.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0477.