



Testimony HB 477
House Environmental and Transportation Committee
February 13, 2024
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all communities are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

HB 477 - This is enabling legislation would give authority to Maryland counties to establish "just cause" or "good cause" limitations on lease non-renewals. That means local policymakers would be able to determine the kind of "just cause" policy that their locality needs, whether by type of building, for certain populations, or under certain circumstances such as a state of emergency. Without this enabling bill, counties are preempted from enacting legal protections for Maryland families who face increasingly unstable housing and fears of retaliation and displacement.

The end of a lease term is a particularly vulnerable time for low-income tenants. Landlords are not required to provide a reason for evicting a tenant at the end of a lease term or for evicting a tenant without a lease (i.e., a resident with a month-to-month tenancy). Moreover, landlords who are unable to evict a tenant during their lease term may choose not to renew the tenant's lease and use the lease holdover as grounds for eviction. A tenant at the end of their lease is also at risk of unreasonable rental increases.

Just cause eviction laws aim to benefit tenants by:

- Protecting renters from evictions for no fault of their own.
- Delivering a sense of stability to tenants.
- Discouraging renters from self-evicting when they receive eviction notices
- Empowering tenants experiencing poor living conditions, discrimination, or other illegal landlord behavior to advocate for improvements with landlords or file complaints without fear of retaliation.

CDN supports fair protections for renters, such as just cause eviction standards to ensure greater housing stability and prevent arbitrary and harmful actions by landlords. Just Cause has a significant impact on communities. Affordable, stable, and accessible housing and robust housing choice are the foundation upon which just and equitable communities are built, but the power imbalance between renters and landlords puts renters at greater risk of housing instability, harassment, and homelessness and fuels racial inequity.

The consequences of evictions are deep and long lasting. Racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to experience poor health outcomes as a consequence of their social determinants of health, including access to health care, education, employment, economic stability, housing, and public safety.

Many cities including Philadelphia, Oakland, Washington D.C have had Just Cause laws since the 1980s. Research shows these laws are working. A 2019 California study measured the effects of just cause eviction laws and found that after these cities passed the ordinance, the reduction in overall eviction filings was statistically significant and noticeable.

And since evictions are associated with poorer health outcomes, lower educational attainment for children, and difficulty finding decent housing in the future, it's clear that preventing unnecessary evictions is a worthwhile goal.

We urge your favorable report for HB 477.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director