

Dear Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland and Renters United. I am a resident of Maryland District 40 and live in the Medfield neighborhood of Baltimore. **I am testifying in support of HB477/SB644.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

HB477 allows local jurisdictions to require a just basis for landlords to either refuse to renew or to cut off month-to-month/week-to-week leases. This legislation would enable local legislatures to pass their own laws, if they choose, limiting how and when lease non-renewals occur, requiring landlords to have a just cause to non-renew, or requiring landlords to prove a just cause in court.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as the rate of non-payment eviction was slowed by court delays and emergency rental assistance, lease-non-renewal evictions roughly doubled. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They have no choice but to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities. A 2019 study from Princeton & the Eviction Lab found “just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates. Given the budget limitations of many states and municipalities to fund other solutions to the eviction crisis, passage of just cause eviction ordinances appears to be a relatively low-cost, effective policy solution.”¹ Without this bill, jurisdictions like Montgomery County and Baltimore City face preemption challenges to trying just cause eviction policies. **This bill gives local legislatures the power to decide what's acceptable and when.** It recognizes that local legislatures know how best to help their renters stay stably housed and able to contribute to the workforce and the economy.

This issue goes beyond economics to long-standing racial inequities in housing policy. Our partners at CASA recently reported that on November 22, 2023, seven residents of the Evergreen Terrace Apartments in Hyattsville, MD publicly denounced evictions that they believed were unjust, based on false evidence targeting immigrant and working class families.²

In October 2023, the National Equity Atlas reported an estimated 98,000 households were behind on their rent in Maryland.³ Of those, 79% of tenants are people of color, including Blacks, Latinx, and Native Americans, and 47% of those households include children. For reference, people of color form less than half of this state's population; supporting their ability to remain in their homes ensures we stop perpetuating racial inequities, especially lifelong detriments suffered by children, as social scientists have documented declining school performance, increased drop-out rates, higher rates of adolescent violence, and worse health outcomes as negative outcomes among children who experienced eviction.⁴

Stable housing is a foundational need. Enabling the ability of local jurisdictions to pass just cause eviction legislation is an investment in racial equity and an investment in our collective future. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of HB477/SB644.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Christina Nemphos
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

¹ <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/effect-just-cause-eviction-ordinances-eviction-four-california-cities>

² <https://wearecasa.org/tenants-at-evergreen-terrace-apartments-call-out-discriminatory-and-unjust-evict/>

³ <https://nationalequityatlas.org/rent-debt>

⁴ https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mdesmond/files/desmondkimbro.evictions.fallout.sf2015_2.pdf