



TESTIMONY
Maryland General Assembly
Environment and Transportation Committee
In Favor of HB1117 - Tenant Safety Act of 2024

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Good afternoon, Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Committee members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Emilee Towey and I am speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Renters Alliance as one of our outreach coordinators. The Renters Alliance is Maryland's first and only regional nonprofit dedicated exclusively to renter outreach, education, organizing, and advocacy. Since our founding in 2010, the Renters Alliance has been an unwavering advocate for expanding and strengthening renter protections, which distinctly aligns with the goals of HB1117 regarding tenant remedies for dangerous defects in the home.

The Renters Alliance is in strong support of HB1117, which will protect tenants from living in substandard housing without tangible recourse. We would like to thank Delegate Stewart for reintroducing this important bill and for his longtime commitment to protecting renter rights. HB1117 will empower tenants with an accessible remedy for dangerous living conditions by allowing them to keep their landlord accountable for serious defects in the home that threaten their life, health, and safety.

There is a shocking disproportionate amount of rent escrow cases filed compared to the large number of tenants suffering in uninhabitable living conditions. The Tenant Safety Act will improve the feasibility and effectiveness of the rent escrow process by allowing tenants under the same landlord to join a single rent escrow case with their neighbors who are experiencing the same repair issues. This will help combat the fear of landlord retaliation by providing tenants with the opportunity to join together as a collective.

Tenants will also be protected with a warranty of habitability, so that they don't have to pay the full amount of rent when landlords refuse to make repairs that tenants are entitled to. If passed, HB1117 will streamline the court process by allowing tenants to recover attorney costs and fees if they win their case. This provision will encourage attorneys to take on rent escrow cases, helping to narrow the gap between tenants living in unsafe rental properties and tenants successfully filing for rent escrow.

This bill will give tenants vital remedies for addressing the lack of crucial repairs in their home that inhibit their right to life, health, and safety. We strongly urge a favorable report. Thank you for your time.