MARYLAND LEGAL AID | *Advancing* Human Rights *and* Justice for All

HB0970 - Real Property - Residential Leases - Rent Increase Prohibition

Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee on Feb. 27, 2024

Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on HB0970 at the request of bill sponsor Delegate Melissa Wells.

MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. We serve residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions and handle a range of civil legal matters, predominantly housing cases. MLA urges the Committee's Favorable report on HB0970, which would add a penalty when landlords violate Real Prop. art. § 8-209.

Section 8-209 was enacted in 2023 (HB0151 /CH0146) so that renters have at least 90 days' notice (in most cases) of a forthcoming rent increase. HB0970 adds two provisions that surround, rather than change, the notice requirement for rent increases. This bill instructs that a landlord who fails to provide the requisite notice may not go ahead and increase the rent. Furthermore, the bill prohibits any retaliation against a tenant – including refusal to renew the lease – when a tenant refuses an increase prohibited due to the landlord's failure to comply with the notice requirement.

In short, HB0970 gives enforceability to last year's enactment. MLA understands that the anti-retaliation measure in HB0970, while lacking a cause of action on its own, would be effectuated by other existing statutes, including the statewide retaliatory eviction statute (Real Prop. § 8-208.1), local retaliatory eviction laws, and consumer protection laws.

For all the foregoing reasons, **Maryland Legal Aid urges the Committee's favorable report on HB0970**. If you have any questions, please contact:

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