

Maryland General Assembly
Environment and Transportation Committee

Written Testimony of Bowie High Student Government Executive Board
Lydia Murray, President

In SUPPORT of HB0964
“Maryland Fair Chance in Housing Act”

February 27, 2024 1:00 pm

Thank you to Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB0964, Landlords and Prospective Tenants - Residential Leases - Criminal History Review (Maryland Fair Chance in Housing Act).

My name is Lydia Murray, and I am a Maryland resident and President of Bowie High’s Student Government Executive Board (SGA). We are a student led organization fundamentally dedicated to government, civic involvement, school unity and spirit, and community advocacy.

We have chosen to submit testimony in favor of HB0964. After reviewing the action to be taken should this act be passed, we ardently support 1) shortening the amount of time (from 7 to 3 years) in which landlords can review the criminal records of a prospective tenant, 2) protecting the privacy of tenants who might otherwise be forced to detail all aspects of their past criminal record, possibly furthering discrimination, and 3) requiring landlords to provide individuals with a specific reason for the denial.

We know that criminal history-based barriers disproportionately affect minorities, and that criminal-based policies are indeed discriminatory¹. Former convicts are more likely to have housing insecurity, homelessness, and familial separation². It is also widely accepted that former criminals have a harder time reentering society, finding housing, and acquiring proper employment post-incarceration. And given that they are not a protected class under the Fair Housing Act, we believe that this bill will protect former convicts (particularly, the minorities most affected by this) and give them a better chance at reentry and acquiring housing.

¹ “Fair Housing Act: Criminal History-Based Practices and Policies.” www.nar.realtor, 7 Apr. 2016, www.nar.realtor/articles/fair-housing-act-criminal-history-based-practices-and-policies#:~:text=While%20persons%20with%20criminal%20records. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024.

² Lake, Jaboa. “Preventing and Removing Barriers to Housing Security for People with Criminal Convictions.” Center for American Progress, 14 Apr. 2021, www.americanprogress.org/article/preventing-removing-barriers-housing-security-people-criminal-convictions/. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024.

Now, I do not have a criminal record, nor do my parents, but I have a family friend who does. I asked him a couple of questions pertaining to how he felt when applying for a home and how he would feel if this bill was passed. Here's what he said: "I experienced this very thing [denial without notice] myself when acquiring my first apartment and it was the first time since being free that it made me feel like I had states blues [troubles with reentry and transition out of incarceration] in the world.

It was only because I had contact [with a government official] that I was able to get my application denial overruled... A bill addressing this very thing is an awesome way to empower individuals to continue to believe in the choices that they're making, to redeem themselves, and to be a productive member of society, community, and family."

Not everyone has the network that my family friend had, and that makes it so much harder to simply find a place to live. This bill has the chance to change the lives of formerly incarcerated individuals- giving them hope to continue on their path to change.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this testimony.