



HB 181 - Failure to Pay Rent Proceedings - Prohibition on Rent Increases and Shielding of Court Records

Environment and Transportation Committee

February 20, 2024

SUPPORT

Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 181. This bill would seal eviction records in failure to pay rent cases where either the courts ruled in their favor, dismissed the matter, or the tenant exercised their right to redeem their property. It is an important first step to ensure that Maryland renters have opportunities that are not currently available to them.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

The effort to legislate the sealing of eviction records is a growing movement nationwide. Since 2019, Massachusetts, Colorado, Nevada, the District of Columbia, Illinois, and Florida have all proposed legislation to seal eviction records. These jurisdictions have recognized that sealing records is not only a matter of protecting tenants' rights, but also an issue of racial justice – particularly for Black women, who face disproportionate levels of eviction both locally and nationwide.

In a 2015 survey conducted by the Public Justice Center, ninety four percent (94%) of participant tenants who appeared for rent court in Baltimore City identified as African American or Black, and eighty percent (80%) identified as women. These numbers play out similarly with evictions in Baltimore City – a Black female-headed household is 296% more likely to be evicted there than a white male-headed household. As stated by Matthew Desmond in a 2014 report on the state of evictions in Milwaukee, “[p]oor black men are locked up while poor black women are locked out.” Sealing records is a powerful solution that work together to mitigate the harm of evictions and ensure that tenants are able to secure alternate housing and avoid homelessness.

Eviction records sealing benefits tenants by providing them the freedom to move to opportunity areas with safe and stable housing, where they have critical access to needs such as transportation, employment, healthcare, childcare, and more. When tenants cannot seal eviction records, even when the courts ultimately ruled in their favor or they successfully redeemed the property, they are often forced to move into any housing that will accept them, which may be substandard or unsafe.

Thus, we encourage you to return a favorable report for HB 181.

Creating Assets, Savings and Hope