



Senate Bill 354

Committee: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 16, 2024

Position: Favorable with Amendments

The Maryland Multi-Housing Association (MMHA) is a professional trade association established in 1996, whose members house more than 538,000 residents of the State of Maryland. MMHA's membership consists of owners and managers of more than 210,000 rental housing homes in over 958 apartment communities and more than 250 associate member companies who supply goods and services to the multi-housing industry.

Senate Bill 354 ("SB 354") establishes the *Rent Court Workforce Solutions Pilot Program* (Program) within the Montgomery County and Prince George's County District Courts. The Program will operate on days that rent court is in session and connect individuals involved in the rent court process with critical workforce development services and employment opportunities to help prevent evictions.

Due to Maryland's right to redeem law, Prince George's and Montgomery County residents have the right to "pay and stay" after a rent court judgement up to three times per year. Due to the right to redeem, many residents that receive a judgment in rent court ultimately avoid eviction by paying the amount of rent due in the judgement prior to an eviction.

By providing employment information and opportunities during the rent court process, SB 354 will create sustainable economic change for residents and break the cycle of residents returning to rent court. Additionally, SB 354 will lower the number of rent court cases and ultimately assist the District Court with streamlining its rent court process.

In FY 2023, Maryland allocated approximately \$11.8 million for the Access to Counsel Program, and Maryland has allocated \$14 million per year for the Access to Counsel Program for FY 2024 through FY 2027. By comparison, the small amount of funding allocated in SB 354 will create beneficial and sustainable outcomes for individuals involved in the rent court process.

Pursuant to SB 354, organizations like Employ Prince George's and WorkSource Montgomery will be able to quickly connect individuals with employment opportunities, workforce services, and wraparound assistance. Collectively, those services create a unique and sustainable method to ensure that more residents are connected with economic opportunities, which will prevent future rent court cases. For these reasons, MMHA strongly supports SB 354 and respectfully requests a favorable report from the Committee.

Please contact Grason Wiggins at (912) 687-5745 with any questions.