

Openings

- Good afternoon Chairman Smith, and Vice Chair Waldstreicher, Honorable Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,
- My name is Afeni Evans, and I am honored to speak before you today in support of the Fair Chance Housing Act. As an organizer who advocates alongside formerly incarcerated people and someone who deeply cares about fairness, justice, and equality for all people. I believe this legislation is a crucial step forward in ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their relationship to state impact, have access to stable housing and a chance to rebuild their lives.

-

Mid-Sections

- Existing research tells us that there is a cyclical relationship between incarceration and homelessness, with people who are formerly incarcerated 10 times more likely to be homeless in their lifetimes than the general public. People who are homeless are also more likely to be arrested, convicted, and incarcerated than the general public. A 2021 review analyzing 18 studies from around the world found that stable housing was associated with decreased criminal activity in every single study. Also, the current recidivism rate in Maryland, which exceeds 40 percent, underscores the urgent need for intervention. By removing barriers to housing and providing necessary community support, we can significantly reduce recidivism rates and increase public safety. In short, this bill will make all of Maryland's communities safer by allowing people with conviction histories to have the stability that comes with being housed.
- Furthermore, this legislation aligns with our shared values of fairness and equality under the law. No one should be indefinitely punished for past mistakes or face lifelong barriers to housing, employment, and other opportunities simply because of their criminal history. Everyone deserves the chance to rebuild their lives, contribute positively to society, and pursue their dreams. By ensuring that individuals with criminal records have access to housing, we are investing in their rehabilitation and reducing the likelihood of future criminal behavior.

Closing

- In closing, this bill will ensure that private, affordable, and public housing can be available for people with conviction histories. This expansion should reduce the stress and overburdening on other components of the housing system, including transitional housing and shelter systems.
- I urge you to support the Fair Chance Housing Act and take a stand for justice, equality, and compassion. By passing this legislation, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of countless individuals and families, promote safer communities, and uphold the principles of fairness and opportunity for all.
- Thank you all for your time and please vote to advance this legislation.