

April 2, 2024
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TESTIMONY ON HB1117 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Landlord and Tenant - Failure to Repair Serious And Dangerous Defects - Tenant Remedies (Tenant Safety Act of 2024)

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: David M. Friedman

My name is David Friedman. I am a resident of District 14 in Colesville/ Cloverly. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB1117, Landlord and Tenant - Failure to Repair Serious and Dangerous Defects - Tenant Remedies (Tenant Safety Act of 2024).

I am an active member of Oseh Shalom, a Jewish Reconstructionist congregation located in Laurel, MD. Jewish tradition emphasizes that every person, regardless of race or income, should have a safe and stable home. As a long-time homeowner, I also appreciate the importance of housing stability and am concerned about the challenges that many renters face in Maryland's dynamic housing market. I am particularly concerned that current "rent escrow" law in Maryland is broken and does not hold landlords sufficiently accountable for failing to repair threats to life, health, or safety. In 2023, Maryland was on pace to see only 1,959 "rent escrow" complaints, yet there were over 66,500 severely or moderately inadequate rental housing units in our State.

The Tenant Safety Act (HB1117) - crossfiled with SB496 by Senator Kelly- will make the "rent escrow" process more accessible to renters and especially groups of renters who want to hold their landlord accountable for severe conditions of disrepair that threaten life, health or safety. Negligent landlords who fail to make repairs will face significant penalties. HB1117 will also level the playing field in regard to attorney's fees by allowing a tenant to recover fees and costs if they win the "rent escrow" case, a feature that landlords already get through their leases. Significantly, as amended in the House, this legislation now addresses concerns from opponents and would go a long distance toward providing Maryland's renters much needed resources to address harmful living conditions.

I respectfully urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to return a favorable report on HB1117, Tenant Safety Act of 2024.