



NAACP

Maryland
STATE CONFERENCE

March 7, 2024

Judicial Proceedings
Maryland General Assembly
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: SB 635 – Landlords and Prospective Tenants - Residential Leases - Criminal History Review
(Maryland Fair Chance in Housing Act)

Members of the Committee,

As the Executive Director of the Maryland NAACP, I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 635, sponsored by Senator West. This bill represents a critical step forward in addressing housing inequality, preventing homelessness, and rectifying the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on people of color.

One of the most pressing issues facing our communities today is the barrier to housing that an individual with criminal records face. Current practices often unfairly penalize individuals with even minor past convictions, leading to housing instability and in many cases, homelessness. This not only perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization but also undermines efforts towards rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Senate Bill 635 aims to rectify this injustice by altering the review period of criminal history in tenant screening reports from 7 years to 3 years. This change acknowledges that individuals should not be indefinitely punished for past mistakes and recognizes the importance of giving people a fair chance to rebuild their lives after serving their sentences.

Moreover, the bill establishes prohibitions and limitations on the consideration of a prospective tenant's criminal history. By doing so, it ensures that landlords assess applicants based on relevant criteria, such as rental history and creditworthiness, rather than solely relying on past criminal records which may not accurately reflect an individual's current circumstances or character.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 635 mandates that landlords who deny a lease application provide the individual with a physical document stating specific reasons for the denial. This transparency is essential in promoting accountability and enabling individuals to challenge unjust denials.

The impact of this legislation extends far beyond individual tenants. By removing barriers to housing, we are also addressing broader societal issues such as homelessness and poverty,

which disproportionately affect communities of color. Research has consistently shown that people of color are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system, and housing discrimination based on criminal history only exacerbates these disparities.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 635 represents a crucial step towards a more just and equitable housing system in Maryland. By supporting this bill, we have an opportunity to uplift our communities, prevent homelessness, and dismantle systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality. We urge you to stand on the side of justice and equity by voting in favor of Senate Bill 635.

In Service,

NaShona Kess, Esq., MLS

Executive Director

NAACP Maryland State Conference

NaShonaKess.mdnaacp@gmail.com