

Dear **Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County, in partnership with [Renter's United Maryland](#) and [CASA de Maryland](#). I am a resident of District 12 and I am a small private landlord. **I am testifying in support of the Tenant Safety Act of 2024, HB1117.**



**Showing Up for Racial Justice**

This bill enables tenants to take legal action when landlords do not fix life-threatening conditions. Furthermore, it would enable a group of tenants with the same landlord, facing issues in the same property, to join a single rent escrow action together, much as a similar law currently does in New York City<sup>1</sup>. Under this law, tenants could make use of the rent escrow process without each having to create a separate filing, ensuring tenants who may be behind on rent are still able to demand remedies from their landlords to potentially life-threatening conditions. It would also provide for attorney's fees and damages in these group actions to allow groups of tenants to enlist the assistance of counsel in organizing a case.

At present in Maryland, a group of tenants experiencing the same substandard living conditions from the same landlord each have to file an action individually. They frequently do not have the benefit of representation as affording counsel is difficult. Even when tenants are able to file, as has been the case in Baltimore for decades, only 6% of cases in rent court result in reduced rent, according to a Baltimore Sun review of over 5,500 cases from 2010 to 2016<sup>2</sup> – a troublingly low rate. This legislation addresses two growing concerns among Marylanders: first, their need for safer housing conditions, and second, the need to lower the barrier of entry to courts to address such conditions. Remarkably, this bill addresses both concerns *while increasing court efficiency*.

Maryland was ranked 32nd among the 50 states for severe housing problems in a recent analysis of US Housing & Urban Development data from 2016-2020<sup>3</sup>. Our state should be leading the nation at providing safe and affordable housing. Instead, we have too many properties bearing significant issues like severe cost burden or insufficient kitchen and plumbing facilities.

Right now, bad actors in the field of property management profit from their inattention or blatant disregard for the law and for tenant safety. Their competitive advantage arises from the legal and moral qualms of good-faith landlords and their tenants' functional powerlessness to hold them accountable. Removing this competitive advantage doesn't hurt but benefits landlords like me who operate legally and ethically.

This bill doesn't create an inspection burden. It addresses how tenants hold their landlords accountable. Fellow landlords may worry about nuisance suits, but I see a much likelier outcome: a more level field where we're not competing with landlords defying the law and where tenants know they can expect redress from landlords who don't respect their safety.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of HB1117, the Tenant Safety Act of 2024**. Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Erica Palmisano  
5580 Vantage Point Rd, Apt 5, Columbia, MD  
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/RPP/230>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.baltimoresun.com/news/dismissed/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/severe\\_housing\\_problems/state/MD](https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/severe_housing_problems/state/MD)