

Dear **Members of the Environment and Transportation 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 Maryland District 40 and live in the Medifield neighborhood of Baltimore. **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 and pursue remedy in court when landlords do not fix life-threatening conditions, including mold.

Furthermore, the bill 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 City¹. 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, and they frequently do not have the benefit of representation as it can be challenging to afford counsel. 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 2016² – a troublingly low rate.

Maryland was ranked 32nd among the 50 states for severe housing problems in a recent analysis of US Housing & Urban Development data from 2015-2019³. 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.

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 poor housing conditions. Remarkably, this bill addresses both concerns *while increasing court efficiency*. Since conditions issues cases can be compiled across a particular property owned by a particular landlord into a single proceeding, the courts are saved the administrative burden of duplicative cases.

This bill helps to level the playing field to ensure that all tenants are able to take action to protect their families against substandard or dangerous living conditions.

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,
Christina L Bell
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

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

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

³ https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/severe_housing_problems/state/MD