



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 26th, 2024

SB 154

**Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Termination and Special Fund
Judicial Proceedings Committee**

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 154. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

SB 154 would make permanent the distribution of funds gained from abandoned property in the State to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund, as well as the Governor's annual \$14,000,000 appropriation from this fund to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation.

As Catholics, we are called to uphold the dignity of every human person and to stand in solidarity with those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or at risk of losing their homes. Ensuring access to legal representation in eviction cases aligns directly with our moral obligation to protect the dignity of families and individuals facing housing instability.

Eviction is not merely a legal matter—it is a profound human crisis with lasting consequences for families, children, and entire communities. Without access to legal counsel, many tenants face the risk of losing their homes due to procedural barriers or an inability to navigate complex legal systems. This legislation would provide a permanent and just mechanism to ensure that vulnerable Marylanders have the legal support they need to remain stably housed.

The proposed allocation of funds, particularly from abandoned property, reflects a responsible and ethical use of state resources. The permanence of this funding also reflects a long-term commitment to justice and fairness in housing, ensuring that no Maryland family is left defenseless in the face of eviction.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on **Senate Bill 154**.