



MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

IOLTA - INTEREST ON LAWYER TRUST ACCOUNTS

Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force and Special Fund
Senate Bill 154 (Cross-Over Hearing)
House Appropriation Committee (primary) and
House Judiciary Committee (secondary)
Hearing Date: March 26, 2025
Position: Favorable (as Amended)

Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) requests a favorable report for Senate Bill 154, which seeks, as amended, to extend the sunset provision on funding for MLSC's Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) program for one additional year through 2028. Additionally, SB154 moves oversight of the current Access to Evictions Taskforce from the Office of the Attorney General to the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Since its implementation, ACE has provided tangible benefits to thousands of Marylanders, with more than 14,000 individuals benefitting directly from the ACE program in FY24, when ACE legal service providers closed **8,894 cases**. Overall, **84% of ACE clients achieved case goals**, reflecting the program's effectiveness in preventing disruptive displacement. Significantly, **88% of tenants who wished to remain in their homes successfully did so due to ACE intervention**. The legal services providers helped **Maryland residents receive more than \$66,000 in housing judgments and avoid more than \$1,679,000 in direct costs**.

In FY24 alone, ACE has helped Maryland residents avoid **over \$6 million in direct costs** and secured **\$650,000 in housing judgments** in FY2024. **For every dollar spent on the ACE program, Maryland sees roughly \$4.00 in economic benefits**. According to their report, Maryland realized economic benefits and fiscal impacts of \$46.7 million.

For over three years, multiple sectors across the state have come together and put in time, funding, and resources into the ACE program. Without the appropriation from the State, ACE would no longer be able to operate, and thousands would be left without representation. Senate Bill 154 remains a wise investment in Maryland's families, communities, and economy. By ensuring the continuation of the ACE program, the General Assembly can solidify its commitment to justice, equity, and opportunity for all Marylanders. For all the foregoing reasons, MLSC strongly supports Senate Bill 481 and urges a favorable report. If we can provide any further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Michelle Siri, Executive Director, at 410-576-9494 x1009, or msiri@mlsc.org.