



Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee
House Bill 339: Real Property-Residential Rental Apartments-Air Conditioning
Requirements
Position: Favorable

February 4th, 2025

The Honorable Marc Korman, Chair
House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Korman and members of the Committee:

Economic Action Maryland is a nonprofit organization that works to advance economic justice and equity statewide through direct service, research, education, and advocacy. Our Tenant Advocacy Program serves renters and property owners in every Maryland county. We provide information and referrals if necessary so that clients with questions about the landlord-tenant relationship can better understand their rights and responsibilities and make best use of resources available to them. In 2024, we served over 800 clients across the state.

We write in support of HB339.

Every year as temperatures rise, we begin receiving complaints about a lack of air conditioning in rental housing – whether it was working and malfunctioned or if it was never present at all. When temperatures and humidity rise to unbearable, dangerous levels, renters contact us to see if there’s something that can be done to get their air conditioning working. Too often, they’re shocked and dismayed that generally, there are few options available to them.

Unfortunately, despite rent escrow’s availability for lack of heat in the winter, air conditioning is not considered essential to life, health, and safety under Maryland’s escrow law. Instead, lack of air conditioning is listed alongside cosmetic issues, with a presumption that it does not pose a serious threat to renters.¹ This inconsistency doesn’t merely lead to discomfort – it’s dangerous, particularly for older adults, young children, and people with a number of underlying health conditions.^{2 3 4}

¹ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/Statute_Web/grp/8-211.pdf

² <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/the-dangers-of-extreme-heat/>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/pubs/extreme-heat-final_508.pdf

⁴ <https://www.weather.gov/ffc/heat2>

The effects of extreme heat are exacerbated by the urban heat island effect. A lack of tree cover and green spaces causes higher temperatures than in surrounding areas. At night the hard surfaces in cities radiate the heat gathered through the day – meaning nighttime temperatures drop less than in surrounding areas. This means people living in cities are exposed to higher temperatures with less relief at night. The burden of consistently excessive heat and humidity makes heat-related illnesses and complications even more likely.

HB339 addresses health and housing equity which are often intertwined. Excessive heat is dangerous on its own. It's more dangerous for older adults, young children, and those with underlying conditions.⁵ During periods of extreme heat, there is the potential for increased mortality from cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, and stroke. Air conditioning reduces severe asthma by filtering allergens that trigger asthma and reducing humidity which can trigger an asthma attack and provide a breeding ground for mold spores and dust mites which thrive in hot, humid areas. According to a 2019 Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC) report, children in Baltimore City were hospitalized 389 times with asthma as the primary reason for admission. Children in Baltimore went to the emergency 3,457 times with asthma as the primary reason for the visit.

Providing air conditioning in new and renovated units will provide relief for tenants as well as likely reduce emergency room visits for cardiac events, asthma, and other respiratory ailments. Our health system will benefit as well as the individual tenants

This legislation is measured. Montgomery County already requires air conditioning in rental housing units if the building is not registered in the National Register of Historic Places. The bill requires climate control capable of cooling a unit to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. The scope of the bill is limited to newly constructed units or renovated units that include replacement of electrical or heating systems. For these reasons, it should not be burdensome on the landlord to provide air conditioning or to make it available to the tenant.

We believe that HB339 is an important first step in providing air conditioning to tenants and treating it as a serious requirement for health and safety. For these reasons, we support HB339 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Zoe Gallagher
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⁵ https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/effects/temperature_extremes.htm