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HB 153 - Residential Rental Apartments - Air-Conditioning Requirements

Hearing before the House Economic Matters Committee on Feb. 5, 2026

Position: Favorable with Amendments

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that stands with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing and their rights to fair and equal treatment by Maryland's landlord-tenant laws, courts, and agencies. We represent or advise over 800 renter households each year, and we advocate to change laws that further a human right to housing.

HB 153 is an important step to ensuring Maryland renters have a safe home. Currently in Maryland, air conditioning is not considered essential to life, health, and safety under Maryland's escrow law in most circumstances and is not a required feature that landlords must offer. This puts the health of thousands of renters, particularly older adults, tenants with disabilities and children, unnecessarily at risk of negative health consequences.¹

In Baltimore City, where most of Public Justice Center's clients reside, there is minimal tree cover and green spaces. In that environment higher temperatures create a deadly situation for those who do not have air conditioning. Because there is no requirement to provide air conditioning generally, approximately 55% of Baltimore households have no guarantee that their homes will protect them from hazardous summer heat. We have left many tenants throughout the state open and exposed to heat-related illnesses and complications. While HB 153 will not address the need for air conditioning in properties that are not new or undergoing substantial rehabilitation, it will ensure going forward that any apartments built or rehabbed in Maryland will have air conditioning. Particularly in light of climate change and global warming, the need to ensure that Maryland's renting families have some protection from heat stroke and other health risks due to heat has never been greater.

We are concerned that the 80-degree maximum temperature provided for in the bill is far too high, particularly for senior citizens and other medically vulnerable residents. We are also concerned that this bill unreasonably exempts the Housing Authority of Baltimore City, which has numerous families in significant need of air conditioning for their health and safety. We believe that this bill sets the legal floor

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/the-dangers-of-extreme-heat/> ; https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/pubs/extreme-heat-final_508.pdf; <https://www.weather.gov/ffc/heat2>

for air conditioning, and that local jurisdictions may impose more stringent requirements, including lowering the maximum temperature in county or city code. To be certain, we request an amendment clarifying that local jurisdictions may pass legislation that exceeds the tenant protections provided for in HB 153.

Public Justice Center asks that the Committee **issue a FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS report on HB 153.**