

# JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 231:**

Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act

**TO:** Chairman Kumar P. Barve, and members of the Environment & Transportation Committee

**FROM:** Derrell Frazier, Policy Advocate

**DATE:** February 4, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support House Bill 231 as a means of increasing affordable housing for low-income residents in Maryland.

An article published in 2016 in *Social Problems*, “Housing and Employment Insecurity among the Working Poor,” shows that working renters who lose their home, often as a result of eviction, are 11 to 22 percentage points more likely to lose their job. Precarious low-wage work with no paid leave and few protections from termination often does not provide workers with the time needed to deal with housing instability and its stressors. Rents in the U.S. have increased significantly since the early 1990’s, outpacing income growth at the bottom of the wage scale, while only one-quarter of eligible households receive housing assistance. Simultaneously, the job market has moved towards more jobs with low pay, limited benefits, and no long-term commitment. Half of the poorest quartile (bottom 25%) of households spend at least half of their income on rent, which puts them in a tight financial position. Many are at risk of falling behind on their rent and, as a result, losing their housing.

In 2018, JOTF released its groundbreaking report “The criminalization of poverty: How to break the cycle through policy reform in Maryland”. The report examines state laws and policies that criminalize and penalize poor communities of color. Challenges that result in and from housing poverty is an example of how poor residents are penalized, and many times criminalized, as result of their inability to meet the financial demands of a law, policy or practice. Moreover, low-income workers without paid or unpaid leave may have difficulty taking time off to deal with the process of eviction and finding a new home without sacrificing work performance.

House Bill 231 seeks to address this by prohibiting landlords and property owners from discriminating against persons seeking housing based on their “source of income.” Source of income (SOI) means any lawful source of funds used in the rental or purchase of housing. It includes money from: (1) any lawful employment; (2) any government or private assistance,

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grant, loan, or rental assistance program; (3) any gift, inheritance, pension, annuity, alimony, or child support; and (4) any sale of property.

Housing affordability and instability is a workforce issue. For those reason, we urge a **FAVORABLE** vote on House Bill 231.