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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB821
Montgomery County Stable Homes Act - MC 12-20

TO: Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, members of the Environment & Transportation Committee
FROM: Jeffrey Rubin

I am a resident of District 15 in Montgomery County and a leader of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), which organizes 5,000 people in Maryland in support of local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns. **I am providing this testimony on behalf of JUFJ, in strong support of HB821.**

Our support is rooted in Jewish values that recognize the fundamental importance of the home for a person's wellbeing and the basic obligations of landlord to tenant. The Babylonian Talmud, a sacred text dating back over 1,500 years, contains specific guidelines concerning the eviction of tenants (Baba Metzia, 101b). An enduring message is that **all people have a right to live in safe and stable housing** and that the needs of the renter must be taken into account.

The harm that befalls an individual, a family, and a community as a consequence of eviction is a toxic blend of psychological instability, emotional turmoil, potential job loss, disruption of children's education, loss of property, and degradation of community spirit. In Montgomery County, 10,451 tenants faced eviction orders last year.

HB821 would not affect most of these eviction cases. The majority of evictions in Montgomery County are due to a failure to pay rent, which is one "just cause" for eviction allowed in the bill. Rather, HB821 would protect many residents who have to leave their homes for no apparent reason. They pay their rent, do not damage the property, and do not engage in disorderly conduct or unlawful activities on or near the premises.

Opponents of this bill say that they are not interested in removing such people from rental units because they lose income when there are vacancies. This claim is disingenuous: vacancies are often easy to fill in a tight housing market and provide an opportunity to increase the rental rate. Requiring people to leave without a just cause is also a convenient excuse for landlords to remove tenants who have asked for repairs to rental properties or other justifiable services incumbent on the landlord, which the landlord doesn't want to do. HB821 would make it difficult for landlords to target tenants for eviction who deserve to remain in their homes. **JUFJ therefore urges a favorable report on HB821.**