



House Bill 861
Real Property – Landlord and Tenant – Reusable Tenant
Screening Reports
Before the House Environment and Transportation Committee
Feb. 16, 2021

Position: FAVORABLE

Renters United Maryland (RUM) is a coalition of independent non-profit, legal services, and community-based organizations. We stand on the principle that housing is a human right that is critical to an individual's quality of life, the health of families, and the prosperity of communities.

HB 861 would allow prospective tenants to obtain a reusable tenant screening report containing a recent and timely consumer credit report, a criminal records check, eviction and rental history, and verification of employment. HB 861 would not require landlords to accept reusable tenant screening reports; rather, landlords who choose not to accept reusable tenant screening reports would simply be required to notify tenants accordingly, either in writing or by conspicuous posting. Landlords who choose to accept reusable tenant screening reports would not be permitted to charge an application fee or other fee to access the report, which is provided directly to the prospective landlord at no cost by the credit reporting agency.

RUM supports this bill because it will create a more affordable option for tenants searching for new rental housing. Currently, tenants may be required to pay an application fee for each unit they apply to - even when multiple properties are managed by the same larger management company. Current law caps nonrefundable application fees at \$25.00¹. For a tenant who is attempting to move quickly and applying to multiple properties, this amount can add up quickly. Indeed, if a tenant applies to rent five rental units, they could be charged up to \$125 in nonrefundable application fees. The burden of paying multiple application fees often means that tenants will either choose to limit their search, reducing the likelihood of finding housing that meets their needs, or will overextend themselves financially to locate such housing.

This is particularly true in a time when tenants across the state have lost their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and cannot afford to pay multiple application fees when they need to move quickly to maintain stable housing and avoid homelessness. The opportunity to obtain a single, reusable tenant screening report would give tenants choice and reduce financial barriers.

The undersigned members of Renters United Maryland urge a favorable report on HB 861.

¹ Md. Code Ann., Real Prop. §8-213(b)(1)(i).

Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC
Renters Alliance
Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.
Public Justice Center
University of Baltimore Civil Advocacy Clinic
Chesapeake PSR
Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership
Bolton House Residents Association
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
Disability Rights Maryland
Beyond the Boundaries
Strong Future Maryland
NAACP Maryland
Maryland Center on Economic Policy