



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Testimony to the House Environment & Transportation Committee
HB049: Landlord and Tenant - Repossession for Failure to Pay Rent - Lead Risk Reduction Compliance
Position: Favorable

January 26, 2021

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, HOB
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of HB049.

In 2020 we received a total of 939 complaints from Maryland residents statewide. Of those 939, 101 were centered around housing code violations, denial of essential services, and otherwise substandard housing. From Baltimore City residents, we received complaints from a total of 232 households, and 35% of those residents were living in properties that were not properly licensed and/or inspected, per Baltimore City law. This represents a 5% increase in unlicensed properties over 2019.

Lead poisoning has been a serious housing issue in Baltimore City for decades, and continues to plague our low-income families, and Black families disproportionately. As part of our work at the Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland, upon receiving a complaint from a tenant, we research the registration and inspection status of each property, along with the lead registration with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). In 2019, one third of the Baltimore City properties researched were found to not to not be registered with MDE. Of these properties, 90% were located in redlined low-income majority-Black neighborhoods where most, and in many cases all, structures were built before 1978. Due to COVID, 2020 numbers are not currently available, but we don't expect the number of unregistered rental properties or the number of lead poisoning cases to have declined. In fact, over the past few years, lead poisoning cases in Baltimore City have increased, cancelling out a historic downward trend.



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This bill takes a step towards addressing the cost to taxpayers when lead laws are not followed by landlords, or enforced by our Judiciary. In 2009, it was estimated that each dollar invested in lead paint hazard control results in a return of \$17–\$221 or a net savings of \$181–269 billion, nationally¹.

It is the landlord's responsibility under the law to provide safe and habitable housing for their tenants. Strong lead laws, and strong enforcement of those laws are necessary to the well-being of not only our state's children, but our state's economy. We cannot continue to ask Maryland's Black and low-income tenants to accept substandard, dangerous housing as the norm. Nor can we continue to ask Maryland's tenants to accept the idea of landlords being allowed to evict tenants while being clearly in violation of our most basic laws and standards. HB049 sends a strong message to landlords and property managers who have continually ignored basic human decency.

For all these reasons, we support HB049 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Carol Ott
Tenant Advocacy Director
Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland

¹ Elise Gould, Childhood Lead Poisoning: Conservative Estimates of the Social and Economic Benefits of Lead Hazard Control, 117 ENVTL.HEALTH PERSP. 1162, 1162 (2009)