



James Chris Perry
1001 Spring Street
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
In favor of the Stable Homes Act (HB 0574)

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Barve and Vice-Chairman Stein and committee members. My name is James Christopher Perry and today I speak as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of the Montgomery County Renters Alliance in support of the Montgomery County Stable Homes Act.

I'm a retired Air Force Vietnam veteran. For nearly three decades, my civilian job was consulting cybersecurity for the U.S. Government. I am currently president of the tenants association in my apartment community. My wife and I are both retired on a fixed income. And for more than ten years, we've lived in an apartment in downtown Silver Spring.

Every year, we get an invitation from our landlord to extend our lease for another year or two. If we don't receive the invitation, we must leave our apartment at the end of the lease term. It's that simple: no invitation, lease expires, and we're out on the streets. The landlord need give us no reason: he simply chooses not to invite us to extend.

Let's be honest about why we need a Stable Homes Act. It's about protection from retaliation for speaking out. It's about protecting tenants who insist a landlord remove mold, plug leaky plumbing, and provide other services guaranteed by law or lease. It means losing your home without just cause when you stand up for your rights. And now, its about protection against losing our home in the middle of a pandemic.

Although there are anti-retaliation laws on the books, it's nearly impossible to prove a landlord has retaliated against a tenant. I know there are some of you who rent to tenants, and I'm sure all of you make sure your tenants live in safe, comfortable dwellings.

But there are landlords who skimp on building materials, hire unqualified repairmen, and generally regard tenants' concerns as annoyances, rather than as residents pursuing their rights to promised or required services. Sometimes, all it takes is for a renter to try to organize a tenants association. To these landlords, tenants who insist on getting maintenance or any promised service are a pain in the neck.

To rid themselves of complaining "problem tenants", these landlords simply un-invite the tenant to extend the lease, and problem solved. But what they have done is frighten whole renter communities into silence, thereby denying them a basic human right: freedom to enjoy a safe, secure, stable home.

And for those who insist that a term lease is just that, we must ask them what motivation they might have to destabilize a family, or the elderly or anyone if they intend to continue to lease the apartment home? Stable, quality housing is not just a commodity like beer or cigarettes. It is an essential human need.

Today I'm asking you to protect us and thousands of other renters by voting favorably and quickly to support the stable homes act to require a good reason or just cause for not inviting us to continue to live in our homes.

Thank you.

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