



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

**Testimony to the House Environment & Transportation Committee
HB451: Real Property - Rental Property Inspection - Remote Video Inspection
Position: Favorable**

February 2, 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 HB451.

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.

Substandard housing has been a serious issue in Baltimore City for decades, and continues to plague our low- and moderate-income families, with Black families with children disproportionately affected. 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 license status of each property, along with the lead registration with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). In 2019 and 2020, 35-40% of those properties were not licensed, and therefore were not inspected, per Baltimore City law.

COVID-19 has created a new set of challenges for both landlords and tenants, and one of those challenges is how to inspect a home while keeping both the tenant and the inspector safe from the risk of infection. We've received inquiries from tenants who are elderly and/or immuno-compromised and have serious concerns about their health and safety during the pandemic -- especially when it comes to allowing strangers in their home.

It is the landlord's responsibility under the law to provide safe and habitable housing for their tenants, and inspections are a part of that responsibility. Allowing video inspections in lieu of in-person inspections could alleviate the risk of COVID infection, keeping both the inspectors and the tenants safe.



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For all these reasons, we support HB451 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Carol Ott
Tenant Advocacy Director
Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland