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February 9, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Room 2E
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Testimony of Maryland Legal Aid in Support of Senate Bill 401 - Nonrenewal of Lease - Notice Requirements

Dear Chair Smith and Members of Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to Maryland's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including family law, housing, public benefits, consumer law (e.g., bankruptcy and debt collection), and criminal record expungements to remove barriers to obtaining child custody, housing, a driver's license, and employment. Maryland Legal Aid supports SB 401 with favorable amendments and asks that this committee give it a favorable report.

This letter serves as notice that Gregory Countess, Esq. will be testifying in support of Senate Bill 401 on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid at Senator Shelly L. Hettleman request. This bill seeks to protect and promote housing stability for Maryland families during and after this global pandemic. By requiring landlords to give either a sixty-day or ninety-day notice to tenants that their lease will not be renewed, depending on how long the tenant has resided in the property and the lease's term, rather than the current thirty-day notice requirement. The proposed change would promote housing security and stability for renters. It would also protect the human right to safe and secure housing as outlined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

There is a significant shortage of affordable housing across Maryland. Given that shortage, it is impractical and perhaps even impossible for tenants, particularly those with limited income, to relocate with only thirty-days' notice. The need for affordable housing has always been apparent but has become even more apparent in light of the coronavirus pandemic. For the thousands of Maryland residents facing housing insecurity due to the pandemic, thirty-days' is not enough time to secure alternative housing. Instead, those people and their families face eviction and homelessness. This can lead to the loss of a housing subsidy, which creates an even more significant obstacle to securing new housing.

MLA advocates have observed widespread evictions throughout the state. MLA assists thousands of clients statewide each year in housing matters, many of which involve

preventing eviction. A scenario MLA has seen frequently is as follows: A client and their children will have resided in their home for years, sometimes over a decade, without any issues. That client's tenancy started as a year-long lease but converted to a month-to-month lease after the first term expired. After years of this arrangement, the landlord notifies the tenant that the lease would not be renewed and the family must find new living arrangements within 30 days. This short notice proves to be an impossible task given the scarcity of affordable housing for low-income citizens. Upon failing to find housing in the 30-day timeline, the family is evicted and left on the street and without anywhere to live.

While MLA sees many clients, those numbers pale compared to the total number of people who face housing instability throughout the state. There are far too many people in Maryland who have experienced the trauma that comes with losing their homes. The price of eviction is high on the individual and society as a whole. Without a home, it is hard for an individual to stay employed, it is hard for a student to succeed in school, and it may be impossible for a family to find a safe and warm place to live.

Requiring a sixty-day notice for tenants who have resided in the property for two years or less and a ninety-day notice for tenants who have resided in the property for more than two years would give tenants more time to secure a new residence. Senate Bill 401 advances the goal of protecting renters from becoming homeless because they cannot secure new housing within thirty days. This bill is necessary to decrease the homeless population. This bill is necessary for the health, safety, and life of renters. This bill is necessary to secure the fundamental human right to safe and secure housing for all people.

Thank you for your consideration of this written testimony. For the reasons stated above, **Maryland Legal Aid urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 401.**

/s/ Gregory Countess
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