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Jeffrey Rubin
Potomac, MD 20854

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB910/HB1312
COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act of 2021

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Dr. Jeffrey Rubin, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUF)

My name is Jeffrey Rubin, I am a physician, a resident of District 15, and a Co-Chair of the JUF Maryland Labor and Housing Justice Team. JUF organizes more than 5500 people around the state in support of local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns. **I provide this testimony on behalf of JUF, in strong support of SB910.**

Our support for this legislation is rooted in Jewish values that recognize the fundamental importance of the home for a person's well-being and the basic obligations of landlord to tenant. The Babylonian Talmud, a sacred text dating back over 1500 years, contains specific guidelines concerning the eviction of tenants (Baba Metzia, 101b). An enduring message is that the needs of the renter must be taken into account.

In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book about eviction and poverty in America, Matthew Desmond painted a vivid picture of the harm that befalls an individual, a family and its community as a consequence of eviction. It often results in homelessness, job loss, disruption of children's education, loss of property, and severe emotional turmoil.

Preventing homelessness is all the more critical in the midst of a pandemic to protect individuals, families, and the public at large. Despite declared moratoriums on evictions, they have continued and reports suggest that they have resulted in hundreds of thousands of additional Covid cases and over ten thousand deaths.^{1,2} To stop this from happening, evictions must cease, except in rare instances of just cause, until the public health emergency is over and due time has passed for recovery from the ongoing economic downturn, which has disproportionately impacted communities that are at risk for eviction. This would prevent eviction of tenants who are unable to pay their rent, as well as tenants whose leases have not been renewed (tenant holding over), a serious loophole in current "moratoriums". Rental assistance from government resources should be provided to renters, or to landlords who

would then forgive past due rent and waive fees and other costs incurred by the tenant, as specified in the bill.

In summary, this legislation would protect tenants, landlords and the general public from the frightful consequences of eviction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, **JUFJ urges a favorable report for SB910.**

¹<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/27/evictions-have-led-to-hundreds-of-thousands-of-extra-covid-cases-.html>

²<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.10.27.20220897v1.full-text>