



Senate Bill 910
COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act
Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 10, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

Renters United Maryland (RUM) is a statewide coalition of renters, organizers, and advocates for safe, stable housing. We stand on the principle that housing is a human right that is critical to an individual's quality of life, the health of families, and the prosperity of communities. The undersigned members of Renters United Maryland urge a FAVORABLE report on SB 910, the COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act of 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put hundreds of thousands of Maryland households on the brink. **Over 2,500 Marylanders have been evicted** since July 2020 as landlords have been able to use loopholes in current restrictions to file more than **117,000 eviction cases**, primarily for non-payment of rent. Without immediate and meaningful action from the Maryland General Assembly during this legislative session, communities throughout the state will face an unprecedented level of displacement. As Attorney General Brian Frosh recently wrote, "Eviction... means loss, not just of a home, but also of possessions, school, community, employment, mental and physical health, and the ability to find another place to live." The risks to individuals and communities increase dramatically as COVID-19 cases surge. Loss of home is a public health risk and can be a death sentence.

The COVID-19 Eviction Relief Act of 2021 does **5 critical things** to support renters and landlords in Maryland during the ongoing pandemic:

1. Establishes a true emergency moratorium on eviction that prohibits lease non-renewals during the emergency.
2. Extends Gov. Hogan's "substantial loss of income" trial defense against eviction through April 2022 and expands the defense to include Tenant Holding Over evictions (based on lease non-renewal).
3. Prohibits late fees and rent increases throughout the emergency.
4. Requires landlords to attempt to use rent relief and repayment plans before they can file for eviction in court and sets forth a statewide rent relief fund that matches state funds to county funds and
5. Mandates the Department of Housing and Community Development's collection and sharing of anonymized, mappable eviction data.

Current eviction protections, both at the state and federal levels, are limited, subject to change, and proven to be insufficient to keep Marylanders stable and housed. Gov. Hogan's Executive Order is a trial defense, not a ban on evictions. If a renter proves "substantial loss of income" related to COVID-19 at trial, then the judge delays eviction until after the State of Emergency. The CDC Order is similar in process but delays eviction until March 31, 2021. Neither order

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protects against lease non-renewals. Some localities have also enacted emergency prohibitions on rent increases and late fees while many others have not. This patchwork approach to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Maryland residents is not working.

Throughout the emergency, renters and tenant advocates have found that many housing providers prioritized lease non-renewal and eviction actions instead of rental assistance. Increasingly, we are seeing that even when landlords have availed themselves to rent relief and cleared their balance sheets, they are continuing with their threats of eviction, including their pending lawsuits. Because Maryland does not obligate landlords to utilize emergency rental assistance as a pre-condition to filing an eviction action, and because landlords are permitted legally to evict their tenants after having received rental assistance funds, millions in taxpayer dollars are being wasted. Emergency assistance should keep Maryland families housed. SB 910 provides the accountability measures to ensure that rent relief serves its purpose.

It is time for the Maryland General Assembly to establish strong protections for renters, provide desperately needed relief for tenants and landlords, and close loopholes that allow for continued filing of eviction cases during this emergency and throughout the ensuing economic recovery.

As members of Renters United Maryland, **we urge a FAVORABLE report from this committee on the COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act (SB 910).**

CASA
NAACP Maryland State Conference
Montgomery County Renters Alliance
Right to Housing Alliance
Strong Future Maryland
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Our Revolution Maryland
Disability Rights Maryland
Homeless Persons Representation Project
Public Justice Center
Santoni Vocci & Ortega, LLC
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
Maryland Access to Justice Commission
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