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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: Robert Barkin

My name is Robert Barkin. I live in the 16th legislative district and I am writing this testimony as a concerned citizen of the state of Maryland. I provide this personal testimony in strong support of SB910/HB1312, the COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act of 2021.

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, our state, as well as the nation as a whole, was facing a housing crisis, which showed itself most egregiously in an epidemic of evictions. Even at a time that the economy as a whole was “booming,” the rate of eviction was proceeding at an alarming rate. According to the Eviction Lab, a database documenting the housing crisis, the national eviction rate in 2016 (the most recent data available) was 1.22%. According to the lab, the Maryland rate at that time was nearly three times the national rate, at 3.56%.¹

Even during the best of aggregate economic activity, housing instability takes an enormous toll on tenants, landlords and society as a whole. There are many hidden costs – the cost of homeless shelters, or the cost to landlords of having to find new tenants, or the costs of lifelong, disastrous educational and psychological effects on children.

During a pandemic, preventing homelessness is all the more critical to protect individuals, families, and the public at large. Despite declared moratoriums on evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have continued at an alarming pace.²

To stop this from happening, evictions must cease, except in rare instances of “imminent danger,” 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, which are predominantly Black and brown. SB910 specifies that an eviction moratorium would exist through April 30, 2022. 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). Rent increases, late fees and interest charges also would be prohibited during this period of economic duress. Rental assistance available to state and local governments would be implemented via a matching fund mechanism to landlords who would be required to certify that the payments relieved tenants of their rental obligations.

In summary, this legislation would protect tenants, landlords and the general public from the frightful consequences of eviction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, **I urge a favorable report for SB910/HB1312.**

¹<https://evictionlab.org/map/#/2016?geography=states&bounds=-151.85,-12.897,-45.588,52.87&type=er&locations=24,-76.04,38.013>

²<https://evictionlab.org/eviction-tracking/>