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January 26, 2021

Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB154 - Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel - Support

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) writes in support of SB154. GHHI has a long-standing history of advocating for families and children on the important issue of lead poisoning prevention and healthy homes. We provide multiple direct services including legal representation of tenants in District Court rent court for the repair of lead and other home-based environmental health hazards and compliance assistance for rental property owners across the state.

SB154 will ensure that low income tenants in Maryland that are facing eviction have the right to an attorney to enforce their existing rights under current Maryland laws. Rental property owner compliance with the Maryland Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Law and local landlord licensing and occupancy permitting are important legal requirements to be upheld in order to increase compliance. Tenant's rights to pursue valid rent escrow claims are key rights to support in leveling the playing field between the parties and better protecting the health and well-being of occupants by increasing the stock of safer rental housing in Maryland. Having a right to counsel will support all of those important objectives.

Tenant eviction is highly disruptive and has substantial societal costs in causing financial and housing instability as well impacting school performance for children who forced to frequently relocate and start anew at another school. In fact, having a right to counsel in Maryland is projected to result in net cost savings. A recent *Economic Impact of an Eviction Right to Counsel Report* by Stout demonstrates that an annual investment of \$5.7 million in a right to counsel for tenants in one Maryland jurisdiction alone would yield \$18.1 million in benefits/costs avoided to the State (and \$17.5 million to the locality). Costs savings or benefits include costs related to among others: homeless shelters, Medicaid spending on hospital care, homeless student transportation and foster care costs. According to Stout, 92% of represented tenants would avoid disruptive displacement with a right to counsel in one Maryland jurisdiction.

GHHI Written Testimony – Senate Bill 154

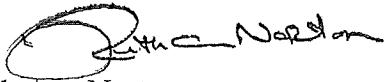
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By passing SB154, Maryland would join seven other jurisdictions in the following cities that have established a right to counsel in eviction cases: Baltimore, Boulder, Cleveland, Newark, New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco. In looking at areas of New York City where right to counsel was implemented, 86% of represented tenants stayed in their rental homes.

We ask you to **Support SB154**.

Respectfully Yours,



Ruth Ann Norton
President and CEO