

HB1312 – COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act of 2021
Position: Support

Dear House Legislators,

I write to you today as a physician/public health practitioner having cared for over three hundred COVID-19 patients in Baltimore's safety net system. I have been involved in direct patient care and administration in this system since the pandemic began in March. In this role I have seen how nearly all of my patients experience homelessness, housing insecurity or crowded living conditions. In fact, this is the most common condition shared by my many patients with COVID-19. Living in congregate facilities such as shelters or substance use treatment rehabilitation centers or in overcrowded homes places individuals at a much higher risk of contracting and disseminating COVID-19. Many of my patients contracted COVID-19 during outbreaks in their congregate living facilities. Indeed reliable epidemiological data from Massachusetts indicates that individuals experiencing homelessness, exposed to the shelter system, had a *24-time higher rate* of contracting COVID-19 than the general population¹. And this was **in April when the shelter populations are relatively low**. As our cold winter continues protecting individuals from eviction is a critical public health priority.²

Protecting renters from eviction is a moral responsibility, especially during a surging, deadly pandemic that risks a massively higher COVID-19 exposure to those evicted. Individuals evicted from their homes either (a) turn to shelters or (b) move into the homes of family or friends. Both of these living conditions have been shown to increase COVID-19 transmission. Assuring eviction relief for renters is an evidenced-based way to prevent unjust evictions and thus COVID-19. In Baltimore, a city with a majority Black population, eviction is also a racial equity and civil rights issue – Black women are nearly four times more likely than White men to be evicted.³ Black communities are also much more likely to get COVID-19 in Baltimore compared to White communities.⁴ Evictions, displacement from homes to shelters or crowded living conditions is a primary determinant of this COVID-19 exposure. Further, given rapid developments in COVID-19 related eviction protections it is likely that marginalized populations are unaware of their housing rights making this an even more essential time to pursue protections from eviction.⁵

The choice before you is clear – pursue an evidenced based policy that will save lives by slowing COVID-19 transmission or allow evictions to continue unchecked and increase public exposure, transmission and death due to COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Mihir Chaudhary, MD MPH

References

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