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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HBI8/SBI54
Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Action – Right to Counsel

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbearly, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Joe Magar, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUF)

My name is Joe Magar. I live in Baltimore City District 41, and am submitting this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUF) in strong support of HBI8/SBI54, Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Action – Right to Counsel. Jews United for Justice organizes more than 5,500 people around the state in support of local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns. We respectfully urge this committee to give this bill a favorable review and assure that every Marylander has access to equal representation when facing eviction.

Jewish law has, for centuries, recognized the importance of equal representation, even in civil proceedings like landlord/tenant disputes. In practices dating back to at least the late 4th Century, civil disputes are heard before a panel of three judges. The two parties involved in the dispute each choose one judge, then those two judges pick third, thus minimizing any risk of individual bias or influence. What HBI8/SBI54 seeks to do is rebalance the power dynamic in rent court to minimize those same risks.

Advocates for this bill have presented the data on how the gross power imbalance in housing court contributes to a worsening eviction crisis, economic and racial disparities, and allows hazardous living conditions to go unaddressed. They have also outlined the economic benefits of assuring renters' rights are defended and reminded all of us how regardless of these benefits it is our moral imperative to defend the rights of all Marylanders.

I would like to address the inevitable rebuttals from landlords and property managers that SBI54 would place undue burden on them or that it would make it too difficult to evict tenants

who are in violation of their lease. The only burden is one that should already be the responsibility of anyone conducting business in the State of Maryland, to follow the rules.

Anyone whose parents are small business owners knows, at the very least, two things; they work hard, long hours, and the kids spend A LOT of time at work. Both of my parents are property managers in the Metro Detroit and pretty much grew up in their office. I went along with them visiting properties all over the city, meeting contracts and prospective tenants and inspecting damage and subsequent repairs. I also sat quietly for what felt like millions of hours as the phone calls poured in about everything from broken lights and leaky pipes, to fires and illegal activity on the premises. Each one of these calls was documented and addressed.

It's hard work, but all broken lights get fixed. The leaky pipes get replaced. Fires usually aren't too big, but even the small ones require special contractors are called to come clean the smoke damage. When there are complaints of illegal activity, the appropriate authorities are alerted, and incidents documented. They manage units all over Detroit and everything—from luxury to subsidize—is kept up to code. They don't cut corners.

Of course, eviction happened too and was handled with the same strict adherence to regulation that guided all of my parent's business practices. They didn't bring the kids to court, but they did put us to work filing as soon as we could reliably alphabetize documents, so I can attest to the detailed nature of their record keeping. Documentation of every work order, payment and request assured that when they did go to court their case was presented clearly and in accordance with the law.

I don't think my parents are champions of housing justice any more than I think that HB18/SBI54 is the silver bullet that will solve a housing crisis deeply rooted in inequality. They are just small business owners who don't break the law. My parents raised two kids in a nice neighborhood and helped us both get through college and grad school, without breaking the law or weaponizing eviction.

HB18/SBI54 won't have much of an impact on law abiding landlords like my parents. Landlords who say it would place undue burdens on their ability to do business need to re-examine their business practices. **JUFJ respectfully urges a favorable report on HB18/SBI54.**