



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 52

Real Property – Alterations in Actions for Repossession and Establishment of Eviction Diversion Program

House Judiciary Committee
February 17, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
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Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports HB 52, which creates an Eviction Diversion program so that eviction is not the first resort for people who have trouble paying their rent.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put hundreds of thousands of Maryland households on the brink of eviction. The pandemic also highlighted the inherent unfairness of Maryland's eviction process and has exacerbated existing disparities in rental debt. 36% of Black households aren't current on their rent, compared to 14% of white households 30% of households earning less than \$50,000 are behind, compared to just 10% of those earning \$75,000 or more.

HB 52 reimagines a system of fairness for tenants in Maryland by:

- Requiring early resort to rental assistance before suing to evict;
- Establishing a formal two-phase proceeding and Eviction Diversion Program that enable renters and landlords to engage financial and legal services and help judges to order alternative dispute resolution where appropriate;
- Providing renters time to seek counsel, to raise a defense, and to prepare for trial; and
- Giving judges broader power to delay eviction in emergency situations - allowing time for renters to recover from critical health problems and to utilize financial assistance to relocate when necessary.

We know Maryland can't recover from this pandemic if the General Assembly does not take action to ensure fair hearings, to prioritize stability over displacement, and to end the disproportionate impact of eviction on Black and Brown communities. MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 52.

SB 454/HB 52 is part of a larger package of Housing Justice bills necessary to support safe, healthy, fair, and affordable housing in Maryland. Marylanders Against Poverty proudly supports this package. For more information visit www.rentersunitedmaryland.org.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.