



**Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee  
February 17, 2021**

**HB 1008 – Failure to Pay Rent Proceedings – Sealing of Court  
Records**

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**FAVORABLE**

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The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 1008, which would require the district court to seal court records relating to a failure to pay rent proceeding that did not result in judgment of possession, and to allow the district court, under certain circumstances, to seal records relating to a proceeding that did result in judgment of possession.

Safe and stable housing is essential to ensuring the health and stability of individuals and families. However, landlords regularly using screening policies that deny housing to potential tenants previously named in an eviction case, even if the case was dismissed or filed on unlawful grounds. These policies block access to housing for families and perpetuate discrimination.<sup>1</sup> From 2012 to 2016, evictions were filed against Black tenants almost twice as often as white tenants.<sup>2</sup> Black women are especially vulnerable to eviction because of pay disparities and wealth gaps, in addition to other discrimination disproportionately impacting women, including discrimination against domestic violence survivors and families with children. And because of the stigma of a prior eviction filing, low-income tenants often endure substandard living conditions and comply with unlawful lease terminations instead of exercising their rights.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, eviction had already become a nationwide crisis because of rising housing costs and stagnant wages. Eviction leads to devastating collateral consequences that perpetuate existing social and economic inequities, including unemployment, health issues, and homelessness. According to The Eviction Lab at Princeton University, Maryland scored 0.8/5 on its tracker of state-

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<sup>1</sup> Desmond, Matthew. (2014, March). *Poor black women are evicted at alarming rates, setting off a chain of hardship*. MacArthur Foundation. [https://www.macfound.org/media/files/hhm\\_-\\_poor\\_black\\_women\\_are\\_evicted\\_at\\_alarming\\_rates.pdf](https://www.macfound.org/media/files/hhm_-_poor_black_women_are_evicted_at_alarming_rates.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Beiers, Sophie, Park, Sandra, & Morris, Linda. (2020, Jan. 10). *Clearing the record: How eviction sealing laws can advance housing access for women of color*. ACLU. <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/clearing-the-record-how-eviction-sealing-laws-can-advance-housing-access-for-women-of-color/>



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level pandemic responses related to housing and eviction.<sup>3</sup> The pandemic has only exacerbated what was already a statewide crisis. Maryland must do more, especially now, to combat the eviction crisis and its collateral consequences, and ensure housing stability for all its residents.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 1008.

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<sup>3</sup> The Eviction Lab. *Covid-19 housing policy scorecard*. Princeton University.  
<https://evictionlab.org/covid-policy-scorecard/>