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February 12, 2021

Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair
Judiciary Committee
House of Delegates
House Office Building, Room 101
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **SUPPORT - HB18** - Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) writes in support of HB18. GHHI is the nation's largest healthy homes organization and is dedicated to addressing the social determinants of health and advancing racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe, and energy efficient homes. By delivering a standard of excellence, GHHI aims to eradicate the negative health impacts of unhealthy housing and unjust policies for children, seniors, and families to ensure better health, economic, and social outcomes with an emphasis on black and brown and low-income communities. The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative has been at the frontline of holistic healthy housing for over three decades.

GHHI developed the holistic energy efficiency, health and housing service delivery model that is implemented in our nationally recognized, Maryland-based direct service program as well in over 25 partner jurisdictions nationwide and whose model was adopted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, GHHI helped to elevate Maryland as a national leader in healthy housing by helping reduce childhood lead poisoning by 99% in the state and designing over 40 pieces of healthy housing legislation that became law in Maryland and local jurisdictions. 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.

HB18 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 for tenants who cannot afford legal representation.

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.

By passing HB18, 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 for a favorable report on HB18.

Respectfully Yours,



Ruth Ann Norton
President and CEO