



Matt Losak
1001 Spring Street
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
In favor of HB 1312, Eviction and Housing Relief Act
Judiciary Committee
Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger and Vice-Chairman Atterbeary and committee members. My name is Matt Losak and I am a co-founder and Executive Director of the Montgomery County Renters Alliance—an alliance of more than 30 labor, community, religious, political and civic action organizations and thousands of renters. We are Maryland’s first and only regional nonprofit dedicated exclusively to renter outreach, education, organizing and advocacy.

In coming months, more than 200,000 Maryland renters risk eviction from their homes. Victor, a senior Gaithersburg retiree we have worked with, simultaneously faced heightened vulnerability to COVID-19 and the loss of housing. Victor had complained to his landlord about illegal, inaccurate late fees. When he asked to see an accounting, the landlord refused and filed for Victor’s eviction, citing “tenant holdover.” Because the court case was a “summary” proceeding, Victor had little opportunity to prove a defense that the eviction was retaliatory. Victor now lives in a motel and has been unable to find housing during the pandemic.

Countless other renters are “self evicting” after receiving threatening notices from landlords. After losing jobs and income due to the pandemic, many renters will simply leave their homes because they see no hope in repaying months of back rent or stopping repeated “failure to pay rent” actions.

The key elements of this bill establish a long overdue framework for stabilizing renters during the pandemic and beyond. It has been well documented by the Washington Post, the Baltimore Sun, Maryland Matters, The Daily Record, WYPR, WTOP regional television news, leading community organizations and many others that Maryland is well behind other states in addressing the unacceptable legal imbalance between renters and landlords.

Despite the annual propaganda presented by the multi-housing industry and their lobbyists, we know that the reasonable renter protection legislation in this bill will not destroy the rental housing industry, but will reduce substantial human and financial costs of unstable housing that we all must pay if this does not pass.

Renters, now approaching 40% of state residents, know what's at stake. Although temporary protections from evictions are helpful, they do little to change the underlying destabilization in Maryland's housing economy.

This bill provides reasonable, modern improvements to the rental housing law and helps stabilize housing during this terrible pandemic. We urge a favorable report.

Thank you.

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