



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 52 (Delegate Wells)  
Real Property – Alterations in Actions for Repossession  
and Establishment of Eviction Diversion Program  
FAVORABLE**

February 17, 2021

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of House Bill 52. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We urge you to support this legislation as part of our efforts to address discriminatory housing practices in the state of Maryland and to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equitably, regardless of background or income level.

According to a [study](#) conducted by the NAEH, more than 7,000 people in Maryland experience homelessness on any given night. Numerous studies have shown that current policies and practice have had a disproportionately negative impact on people of color, and that tenants from low-income backgrounds are experiencing significantly higher rates of homelessness as a result of evictions. While not all evictions result in homelessness, [studies such as this one](#) from the University of Notre Dame have shown that there is a significant correlation between the number of evictions and the rate of homelessness in a given area. This same study also demonstrates that individuals from marginalized backgrounds are significantly more likely to become homeless following an eviction. One of the main reasons why homelessness is so widespread in the state is due to the ease with which landlords can file an eviction with the local and state court systems and the lack of opportunity for tenants to contest a claim before a verdict is rendered.

HB 52 aims to address homelessness through the use of alternative diversion programs that would not only help to reduce the incidence of evictions in the state but would also make it easier for non profit organizations and other entities to help provide financial assistance and allow tenants a reasonable amount of time to find housing before they move out. There are several key components of this bill we wish to highlight. The first would allow tenants to stay in their homes if there is evidence that the eviction would negatively affect the health of the tenant

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or if the dispute is currently being settled through a diversion program where a charitable or non profit organization is working to prevent the tenant from experiencing imminent homelessness. These provisions are important because they will help to substantially reduce the incidence of homelessness in the state, and to alleviate and reduce other negative outcomes that result from evictions.

This legislation provides further assistance by requiring landlords to inform tenants of their legal rights and public resources that are available to them under state law. Landlords would also be required to provide details of the specific time periods during which the rent had not been paid by the tenant before an eviction claim could proceed. These changes will not only make it more difficult for landlords to serve frivolous eviction notices, but will also help to prevent much of the emotional trauma that many tenants experience when threatened with eviction.

Another key component of the bill requires landlords to cooperate with outside organizations that are helping the tenant in the dispute and on other issues related to the eviction. This provision would not only help to create a level playing field in which landlords do not have an unfair advantage over tenants, but would also make it possible for experienced professionals to help tenants navigate the legal process more effectively and to decide on the course of action that will deliver the best possible outcome for the tenant.

Lastly, this bill would also allow judges to recommend that the dispute be resolved through an eviction diversion program or an alternative dispute resolution office when the former is not available. It should be noted that one of the most devastating consequences of an eviction is that it will remain on credit history reports for years to come, making it much more difficult for tenants to find another place to live.

House Bill 52 is comprehensive legislation that can be implemented quickly and effectively to address the evictions crisis, which is why Strong Future Maryland asks for a favorable report.

*John B. King Jr.*  
*Founder and Board Chair*

*Alice Wilkerson*  
*Executive Director*