



March 15, 2021

HB 1346

Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Proceedings – Catastrophic Health Emergencies

Judiciary Committee

Position: Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1346, **legislation that would permit a “catastrophic health emergency” to be considered an affirmative defense in failure to pay rent cases. This would allow for persons whose health is threatened by exposure to a deadly agent to temporarily avoid evictions.** Arundel Community Development Services, Inc., (ACDS) serves as Anne Arundel County’s nonprofit housing and community development agency, helping Anne Arundel County residents and communities thrive through the provision of safe and affordable housing opportunities, programs to prevent and end homelessness, and community development initiatives. In fulfilling this role, ACDS administers grants to nonprofit partners, directly develops and implements programming, and advises the County on housing and community development policy initiatives.

Working with County Executive Pittman and Anne Arundel County, ACDS stood up the State’s first Eviction Prevention Program (EPP) specifically in response to COVID-19, to help income eligible renters who have lost income due to COVID-19 and can no longer afford rent payments. As the administrator for this program, we have worked with families who lost income due to the catastrophic health impacts of COVID-19 and are facing rental eviction. Our case managers witness firsthand the stress and mental health burden households carry when they think they could be evicted on top of dealing with the physical health trauma of the disease.

Allowing catastrophic health emergencies as an affirmative defense in failure to pay rent cases is a prudent policy given the times in which we live. This will allow for a temporary pause in eviction proceedings while households address an emergency health crisis, allowing the household to then gather the resources and assistance they need or make alternative living arrangements. This bill gives individuals and families the dignity they deserve, while preventing evictions and ensuring we do not add to the number of homeless individuals and families in our communities throughout the State.

For the reasons noted above, we urge a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 1346.