



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 729
Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Actions –
Filing Surcharge and Prohibited Lease Provisions
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 729. 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 National Council of State Housing Agencies, an estimated 140,000 evictions were filed in Maryland in January 2021. Unless legislative action is taken, the [number](#) of evictions in Maryland is expected to almost double by the end of the year, increasing to more than 320,000 households.

The housing policies currently in place are characterized by long-standing structural and procedural inequities and are forms of systemic oppression and racial discrimination that have a disproportionately negative impact on people of color and other marginalized groups. According to [this study](#) of evictions in Baltimore, the rate of eviction of black households was more than three times higher than that of white households. The same study also found that female headed households were also disproportionately affected by evictions, with black female-headed households experiencing almost 300 percent more evictions than white male-headed households. Numerous other studies have also shown that the status quo currently places an undue burden on low and moderate income families and that tenants from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly more likely to experience eviction than the general population.

According to the Office of the Attorney General, the rate of eviction filings in the state regularly exceeds 80%, which is far higher than that of neighboring states such as Pennsylvania and Virginia, which have eviction filing rates of 5.3 percent and 15.7 percent respectively. This is due in large part to the fact that we have some of the lowest eviction filing fees in the country. It should be noted that in Maryland it currently costs only \$15 for a landlord to file an eviction

info@strongfuturemd.org

PO Box 164 | Arnold MD 21012

240-643-0024 | strongfuturemd.org

@FutureMaryland @StrongFutureMD

notice. This fee is so low that it allows landlords to use the eviction process as a means of collecting late rent since it's cheaper to file for eviction than it is to start collections proceedings. HB 729 will address this issue by increasing the surcharge that the court is required to assess when filing a civil case for an eviction from \$15 to \$120. This legislation will also prohibit the landlord from including a provision for reimbursement in the rental contract, which means that the landlord will not be allowed to force the tenant to pay the surcharge in the event of an eviction. The adoption of this legislation means that landlords will be incentivized to work with tenants to find a mutually acceptable solution and to resolve disputes outside the court system, which in turn will help to reduce the number of evictions and provide tenants with better outcomes.

Strong Future Maryland urges the committee to vote favorably on HB729.

John B. King Jr.
Founder and Board Chair

Alice Wilkerson
Executive Director