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**SB 670**  
**Courts - Civil Jury Trials - Amount in Controversy**  
**Hearing before the House Judiciary Committee, March 31, 2021**  
**Position: OPPOSE**

The Public Justice Center opposes SB 670 which would begin the process of doubling the amount in controversy threshold under the Maryland Declaration of Rights for a civil jury trial from \$15,000 to \$30,000.

The primary effect of the bill would be to deny access to the jury system to people of modest means throughout Maryland.

The deliberations thus far on the bill make clear: the tail is wagging the dog. The debate between proponents and opponents has centered on small personal injury matters and which party can better use the demand for jury trial to strategic advantage for delay and a more favorable posture in settlement negotiations. But this is far from the whole story.

- **Low-wage workers fighting wage theft by unscrupulous employers**
- **consumers with claims for false advertising, abusive debt collection, and other consumer protection violations**
- **tenants facing retaliatory evictions, uninhabitable conditions, or related suits for disputed rent**

These are examples of cases where the right to a jury of one's peers would be denied but only to those whose standard of living puts the value of their legal disputes between \$15,000 and \$30,000.

The current civil jury trial threshold is approximately what the original threshold of \$500 is today if adjusted for inflation. And it is already the highest in the country. Doubling the threshold would put Maryland even farther out of step with all other states whose thresholds are a third or less of ours. SB 670 is a solution in search of a problem.

**Doubling the current civil jury trial threshold only serves to shut poor people out of one of democracy's most important rights.** Access to justice must not depend on one's purse. Given the disproportionate impact of poverty and the income and wealth gaps on people of color, this bill goes in the wrong direction. See Court of Appeals Statement on Equal Justice under Law, June 9, 2020.\*

**Please give SB 670 an unfavorable report.** If you have any questions, please contact Debra Gardner at [gardnerd@publicjustice.org](mailto:gardnerd@publicjustice.org) or 410-625-9409 ext. 228.

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\* <https://mdcourts.gov/sites/default/files/import/coappeals/pdfs/statementonequaljustice060920.pdf>