



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 17, 2021

HB 52

Real Property – Alterations in Actions for Repossession and Establishment of Eviction Diversion Program

House Judiciary Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public-policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch) dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

House Bill 52 establishes the Eviction Diversion Program in the District Court to reduce the incidence of judgments for repossession of residential property and to promote continuity of housing; requiring the Chief Judge of the District Court to establish a Program in a District Court sitting in a county that processed 10,000 or more claims for repossession of residential property in fiscal year 2019; requiring that a landlord provide a certain written statement to a tenant within 5 days of receiving a certain request from the tenant.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 109-204,000 Maryland households were at risk of eviction at the end of 2020.¹ Meanwhile, 41 percent of Maryland renter households, pre-pandemic, were cost-burdened, meaning they paid 35% or more of their income for housing costs. In FY 2019, there were 669,778 eviction cases filed in Maryland – that is 5 cases filed per cost-burdened household. The struggle to maintain a home in a crisis has become undeniable. Maryland needs a fairer “Failure to Pay Rent” eviction process, one that focuses on housing stability instead of housing loss.

Recently several bishop chairmen of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) wrote to all members of Congress addressing housing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic stating “Ensuring stable housing is essential, especially during a public health crisis. Emergency rental assistance that meets today’s historic need is crucial in order to avoid evictions for tens of millions of people...to keep people safely housed until they are able to access these services, it is necessary to strengthen and extend eviction and foreclosure moratoriums and establish a national utility shutoff moratorium.”

For this reason the Conference appreciates your consideration and urges a favorable report for House Bill 52.

¹ Stout Risius Ross, LLC, Estimation of Households Experiencing Rental Shortfall and Potentially Facing Eviction, <http://bit.ly/stoutevictiondata> (select “Maryland” in drop-down menu).