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**TESTIMONY ON HB881 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Just Cause Termination Provisions**

**TO:** Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

**FROM:** Dr. Jeffrey S. Rubin, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Jeffrey Rubin. I live in District 15, and **I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice, in support of HB881, Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Just Cause Termination Provisions.** JUFJ organizes more than 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice inspired by Jewish values.

My support for this bill is rooted in Jewish values that recognize the fundamental importance of the home for a person's well-being, as well as the basic obligations of landlord to tenant. The Babylonian Talmud, a sacred text dating back over 1500 years, contains specific guidelines concerning the eviction of tenants (Baba Metzia, 101b). An enduring message is that the needs of the renter must be taken into account.

The home has a singular value that is different from other types of property. Simply put, it is the foundation upon which everything else of value in a person's life will rest. It is the place where one shelters from the weather, stores most of one's other possessions, and is entitled to privacy that enables a person to cultivate a life of one's choosing. It is the place where a person has the opportunity to raise a family. It is the focal point for a web of social interactions that include friends, neighbors, schools, and other civic institutions.

In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book about eviction and poverty in America, Matthew Desmond painted a vivid picture of the harm that befalls an individual, a family and its community as a consequence of eviction ([Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City](#)). It's a toxic blend of psychological instability, emotional turmoil, potential job loss, disruption of children's education, loss of property, and degradation of community spirit. For years, this has been a significant

problem in Montgomery County as well as other Maryland jurisdictions, and it has become an even greater concern during the COVID pandemic.

Because of its crucial role in the well-being of individuals, families and their surrounding communities, special protections are warranted to ensure the stability of the home. HB881 is designed to allow local jurisdictions to choose to enact such protections, while respecting the needs and rights of the landlord. It outlines an array of circumstances that justify a landlord's decision not to renew the lease of a renter. These conditions include various contractual obligations to the landlord and specific provisions that allow the landlord to renovate or make other use of the property, such as for housing of a family member. However, it does not permit the landlord to displace renters from their homes in the absence of one of these just causes. The intention is to provide security for the renters who have made that residence their home.

Some landlords will contend that they only choose not to renew leases when they have tenants who cause trouble and are no longer welcome. They claim that the cost of having an empty rental unit is a disincentive to non-renewal of leases. While that may be a disincentive in principle, unfortunately there are many instances in which landlords have an even greater incentive to send residents packing: the opportunity to rid themselves of residents who ask for repairs of unhealthy, substandard housing; or the desire to raise rents dramatically. **HB881 would make it difficult for landlords to remove tenants who deserve to remain in their homes.**

In recent years, supermajorities of both the Montgomery County Council and the Montgomery County House Delegation have voted in support of just cause legislation. However, the Maryland General Assembly has failed to respect the will of County residents as expressed by these large majorities of their representatives. HB881 provides a remedy to this impasse by enabling local jurisdictions to determine the fate of such legislation.

**For all these reasons, on behalf of JUFJ I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB881.**