

February 22, 2022

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0674/SB0384

Landlord and Tenant Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination

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

FROM: Anna Levy

My name is Anna T Levy, a resident of Rockville, MD, District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0674/SB0384, Landlord and Tenant Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination.

Safe and stable housing has far reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. Renters routinely have little agency when faced with threats to maintaining stable housing. As a Jewish person, I am taught that all people should have *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for each person's needs. (Deut. 15:7-8) Consequently, society has an obligation to make sure that people can stay in their homes, especially during a time of pandemic.

Over 655,000 eviction cases were filed each year prepandemic in the State of Maryland among 805,000 renter households. Notably, evictions have a disparately negative impact on Black and brown households in Maryland. This has been particularly evident during the current health emergency. Since the lifting of the federal and state emergency stay on evictions, the courts are once again able to hear failure to pay rent cases. Approximately 700 households were evicted per month in the second half of 2021. This is in spite of the fact that we are still very much in a public health emergency, and in spite of the fact that funds from available emergency rent programs (ERAP) could cover the \$392 million estimated rent debt in Maryland (December 2021, Renters United of MD).

In 2021, the MD General Assembly passed the Access to Counsel bill, HB18, establishing Access to Counsel to provide legal service to low-income tenants. It also extended the notice period for an eviction filing to 10 days. The State of Maryland has received large amounts of funding for emergency rental assistance to help renters, behind in rent due to COVID19, to cover their overdue rent and fees and remain safely in their homes. Although these measures have been successful in protecting a great number of renters, distribution of ERAP funds has lagged behind the need. This puts renters awaiting resolution of applications for assistance at high risk of eviction before they receive pending assistance.

This bill will provide authority to the Courts to pause the eviction process for tenants who have good faith applications for rental assistance pending. It also requires landlords to accept rental assistance rather than refusing to accept it and taking tenants to eviction court. No one should face eviction from their homes if they are eligible for available assistance, especially during a pandemic.

I respectfully urge a strong report from the Committee in support of passage of HB0674/SB0384.