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Judiciary Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 2, 2022

The Honorable Delegate Kumar P. Barve

Chairman of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

6 Bladen Street, Room 251

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

House Bill 367

Good afternoon, Chair Barve, Vice-Chair Stein, and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee. I am Delegate Nicole Williams of District 22, and I will be testifying today in favor of **House Bill 367**, also known as **Landlord and Tenant - Repossession for Failure to Pay Rent - Rental Assistance Programs**. This emergency bill would require landlords to send tenants information about the programs available for Emergency Rental Assistance funds, for landlords to seek out funds from one of the rental assistance programs if a tenant is experiencing financial hardship from the COVID-19 pandemic before filing to evict, and to provide any documentation requested if the tenant seeks funds prior the landlord commencing an action against the tenant. This bill will expire when all of the Federal Cares Act money and the American Rescue Plan money expires or on June 30, 2023, whichever comes first.

Difficulties in paying rent because of the pandemic are found to be more prevalent in communities of color, with 28 percent of Black renters, 20 percent of Asian renters, and 18 percent of Latino renters reporting being behind because of pandemic losses.

Several property management companies have been great about working with tenants during this pandemic. But some have continued to press forward with filing for eviction even though they know that the tenant has applied for rental assistance. The emotional and physiological effect that this has on tenants who are trying to do the right thing causes undue stress on the tenant and their families.

This bill places a small stay on the process at the beginning instead of at the end of the eviction process which prevents the tenant from having a court filing that will show on the tenant's credit report and record which will harm the person's chance of obtaining housing, credit or employment in the future.

The opposition is going to say that this will dramatically delay the process for their clients. They are going to talk about the backlog of cases and their need to file for eviction as quickly as possible to protect their interests and that once the landlord receives the funds, they will dismiss the eviction. However, given the backlog of cases, they probably will not be able to get into court anyway before this bill expires in 2023 in certain jurisdictions so the horrible delay caused by this bill does not exist in reality because it is already there. However, this bill will help bring at least temporary peace of mind to the tenants in this unfortunate circumstance because of COVID.

If a tenant chooses not to seek assistance, work with their landlord, or is ineligible for the relief funds, a landlord may file for eviction. Establishing this step in between the failure to pay rent and eviction will be crucial in keeping people in their homes during this continued public health emergency.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to give a favorable report on House Bill 367.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole A. Williams, Esq." in a cursive script.

Delegate Nicole A. Williams, Esq.