



**HB0881 - Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and  
Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination  
Provisions**

**Hearing before the House Environment and  
Transportation Committee,  
Feb. 22, 2022**

**Position: SUPPORT (FAV)**

Baltimore Renters United (BRU) is a coalition that envisions a Baltimore where all renters have safe, stable, affordable, and fair housing and where all tenants, especially those who are marginalized by virtue of being Black, Brown, low-income, or

otherwise, are free from exploitation. We envision a future where land and housing are community-controlled and a basic right.

My name is Tisha Guthrie and I serve as both a member at large and on the Steering Committee of BRU. My lived experience as a single Black woman with a disability, a licensed social worker, a Baltimore renter and the sister of a renter informs my advocacy around housing and renters' rights. For decades, our nation has refused to significantly address what has become an affordable housing crisis. No state in the union has enough affordable housing for the families in need. Those who are fortunate enough to secure such housing deserve legislation which ensures their basic human need for shelter is protected.

In December 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, after 9 years of maintaining a flawless rental record and with no prior warning, my brother was given 45 days to vacate the premises. After paying for repairs and requesting nothing from the property owner, my brother was invested financially and emotionally in this home. The fact is that such abrupt and unwarranted behavior may be unethical and inhumane but not illegal and my brother had no legal recourse. This not only has the potential to uproot individuals and families; communities and businesses also suffer as a result of this undue disruption.

HB0881 is enabling legislation that would give clear legislating power to Maryland counties to establish “just cause” or “good cause” limitations on lease non-renewals. This bill expressly grants authority to local legislatures to decide when it is appropriate for rental agreements to be non-renewed. That means local policymakers would be able to determine the kind of “just cause” policy their locality needs, whether by type of building, for certain populations, or under certain circumstances such as a state of emergency. Without HB0881, local efforts are stymied by legal concerns around preemption. We urge the Committee to move HB0881 favorably so the local government can act with clear authority on this issue.

*What is “just cause” policy?*

When it comes to lease non-renewals, Maryland is currently a “no cause” state – that is, a landlord can decide to non-renew without any stated cause. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They are under constant pressure to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities.

HB0881 enables Maryland counties to pass local “just cause” laws that limit lease non-renewals. “Just cause” means that a landlord may choose not to renew an expiring lease only if there

is an acceptable basis for that decision. HB0881 defines “just cause,” including an inclusive but non-exhaustive list of acceptable bases – such as substantial lease violations, illegal activities, removal of the property from the market, or personal use of the property by the owner. HB0881’s list reflects the policies other U.S. jurisdictions that have enacted just cause policy. *It is, however, a list that localities are free to adopt or change, as localities see fit.*

### ***Where is the interest in just cause eviction”?***

Since 2008, just cause eviction legislation has been introduced in 8 times – including multiple statewide bills, as well as bills specific to Prince George’s County and Montgomery County. During the COVID-19 state of emergency, Howard County unsuccessfully attempted to prohibit lease non-renewals while Baltimore City passed a short-term provision to require just cause for lease non-renewals until 6 months after the state of emergency’s end. These efforts demonstrate a sustained desire in Maryland localities for just cause policies.

Washington, D.C. (since 1985) and Philadelphia (since 2018) have adopted just cause eviction policies, and the state of New Jersey, too (since 1974). New Jersey’s policy endeavor over many decades demonstrates that the benefit of just cause far outweighs the hypothetical that it hurts development. [“Something in the](#)

Garden State is clearly working. According to data from the Eviction Lab, New Jersey cities such as Trenton, Paterson, Jersey City, and West New York have among the lowest eviction rates in the country. Meanwhile, construction is absolutely exploding.”

Additionally, looking at 4 localities in California, a [2019 Princeton/Eviction Lab](#) study finds that "just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates. Given the budget limitations of many states and municipalities to fund other solutions to the eviction crisis, passage of just cause eviction ordinances appears to be a relatively low-cost, effective policy solution."

HB0881 recognizes that local legislatures want to aid their renters in achieving stable housing so that they are able contribute long-term to the workforce and the local economy. Requiring just cause as a precondition for an eviction can be a tailored policy that boosts the stability of the housing market by stabilizing families, neighborhoods, and communities.

HB0881 ensures local legislatures can pass enforceable laws whereby no one is arbitrarily deprived of their housing.

Baltimore Renters United **urges the Committee’s report of Favorable on HB0881.** For more information, please contact Tisha Guthrie, [zigtgut@gmail.com](mailto:zigtgut@gmail.com)