



Hearing before the Environment and Transportation Committee, March 29, 2022

SB 384 - Landlord and Tenant – Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance

Position: SUPPORT (Favorable)

March 29, 2022

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center, Inc. (“St. Ambrose”) to urge the Environment and Transportation Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 384, which gives Maryland Courts the authority to pause an eviction proceeding while a tenant seeks rental assistance. SB 384 was heavily amended in the Senate to address landlord concerns and was passed unanimously by JPR.

St. Ambrose is a Baltimore based non-profit whose mission is to create, preserve, and maintain equal housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income people primarily in Baltimore City. The Legal Services Department at St. Ambrose provides pro bono legal services which help preserve housing stability for an average of 1000 residents a year. Among these are people facing the possibility of eviction for failure to pay rent. Since the beginning of 2022, our staff of four attorneys received nearly 100 calls from tenants seeking counsel.

One of our clients is a mother who had to leave her job because of medical complications during her pregnancy last fall. When she couldn’t afford her rent, she applied for Baltimore City’s emergency rental assistance program. Though she qualified for help, her landlord refused to participate. Instead, they filed multiple failure to pay rent actions against her and nearly evicted her (and her kids) twice during the first two months of 2022. Thankfully, before her most recent scheduled eviction, one of our attorneys intervened and was able to advocate for her landlord to accept rental assistance funds. Though she was not evicted, she still endured months of extreme stress, sleepless nights, and fear about finding a safe and healthy place for her kids to live. She is not alone: in a survey of pro bono attorneys across Maryland, 73% had cases where a client faced eviction while a rental assistance application was pending. Despite Maryland’s record-setting funding for eviction prevention, in the second half of 2021, there were nearly 27,000 eviction cases filed for non-payment of rent *per month*.

SB 384 would give judges discretion to stay proceedings for up to 35 days as rental assistance applications are evaluated, giving tenants time to receive these critical funds before an eviction judgment is entered. Accordingly, we ask for your favorable report on SB 384. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Gerard Joab
Executive Director
St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center