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HB0928 – Discrimination in Housing – Citizenship, Immigration Status, and National Origin

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

Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that serves over 600 renters each year. We stand with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing. PJC seeks the Committee’s Favorable report on HB0928 because it addresses ever-present discrimination and retaliation against immigrant renters.

HB0928 would strengthen Maryland fair housing protections by adding citizenship and immigration status as protected classes. This measure recognizes that immigrant renters who face status-related threats or discrimination need a clearer footing in fair housing law than the existing national origin basis. This bill would target multiple ways in which landlords use immigration status (real or perceived) to jeopardize renters’ access to safe and habitable housing, not the least of which are threats of deportation.

For thousands of immigrants living in Maryland, HB0928 would open avenues to affirmative legal action against discriminatory or retaliatory landlords. Without HB0928, landlords may continue to target immigrants, particularly those from Latin America, forcing them to accept predatory anti-consumer practices and uninhabitable homes for fear that they might be reported to federal immigration authorities. We urge the Committee to move HB0928 favorably so that all immigrants living and working in Maryland are empowered to feel safe in their homes.

HB0928 reins in unscrupulous landlords who use the threat of immigration enforcement to force renters to accept predatory practices.

The Human Right to Housing team at the Public Justice Center conducts targeted outreach to tenants of Latine descent in Baltimore City. We see firsthand that Latine tenants are particularly vulnerable to discrimination based on their citizenship, immigration status, or national origin. They are targeted by unscrupulous landlords who believe them to be powerless.

Latine renters make up a disproportionate amount of the contingent, low-wage, and essential workers in our region. They do not have the luxury of working from home during a pandemic or taking time off when they are sick. If they contract COVID-19 and stay home, they risk losing a week's worth of income or even losing their job. We have spoken to households in which the entire family contracted COVID-19 and lost every source of income in just a few days. Although Latines make up only 10.6 percent of the state population, per recent U.S. Census data, the most recent Household Pulse Survey data (Week 41) indicate that Latine renters account for 56 percent of renters who feel "very likely" to be evicted within the next two months. Additionally, relative to their need, Latine renters are far less likely than Black and white renters to apply for emergency rental assistance.

PJC has seen countless Latine tenants who, already in peril financially, feel they must accept illegal, non-judicial evictions, or dangerous, uninhabitable housing conditions in order to avoid deportation.

Public Justice Center is a member of the Renters United Maryland coalition and asks that the Committee **issue a report of FAVORABLE on HB0928**. If you have any questions, please contact Zafar Shah, shahz@publicjustice.org, (410) 625-9409 Ext. 237.