

February 22, 2022

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TESTIMONY ON SB384/HB674 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
**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: Sherry Glazer, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Sherry Glazer, and I live in Bethesda, MD, District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB674, Landlord and Tenant - Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across Maryland in support of state and local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

I am driven by my Jewish values on this subject. Jewish texts are full of conversation, laws and traditions about the obligations of landlords and tenants, about building homes safely and about making sure people can remain housed. For example, the Talmud teaches that a landlord cannot evict a tenant during the rainy season - surely a pandemic would be a similarly important time to protect against homelessness. The Gemara in Bava Kamma teaches that, in response to a plague, we have an obligation to stay in our homes as much as possible. It is unjust and cruel, and contrary to Jewish values, to rush toward eviction where there is a less drastic alternative which could avoid eviction altogether.

I am also driven by my past experiences as a retired lawyer who has represented tenants in New York City and has worked with the Landlord-Tenant Commission in Montgomery County, Maryland. I have observed firsthand that the loss of housing is devastating and has lifelong consequences to tenants, their families and their communities. During this once in a century pandemic, those adverse consequences are undoubtedly multiplied.

HB674 provides critical protections to tenants who have applied for Emergency Rental Assistance but who await final processing of their applications and the disbursement of funds. The bill provides for an automatic stay of any eviction proceeding where a tenant has duly applied for rent relief but, through no fault of their own, is waiting for the local government machinery to run its course.

Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act in 2021, which provided for rental assistance funds to be distributed to each state, including Maryland. Distribution of the funds in Maryland began through a process devised by each County. While I believe that each County is doing its level best to distribute these funds, it is taking months for overburdened agencies to process the rental assistance applications. HB674 will require Maryland courts to stay eviction proceedings while a rental assistance application is pending.

It is an incredible injustice, as well as nonsensical, to evict a tenant who is in this legal limbo. The American Rescue Plan Act allocated funds to each state for the precise purpose of preventing evictions. Evictions always lead to a slew of undesirable outcomes, but never more so than during an ongoing public health crisis where being sheltered is vital to individual tenants, and the public health of the community. It is also a waste of Maryland's scarce resources to evict tenants who are on the precipice of obtaining funds to pay their rent and would likely result in more homelessness and funds expended for emergency shelters. HB674 will halt unnecessary proceedings, slow the process down, and result in judicial economy.

We hope that the General Assembly will prohibit the Maryland Courts from proceeding with an eviction while a tenant's emergency rent relief application is still pending. **On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I urge a favorable report on HB674.**