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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0881**

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

**TO:** Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

**FROM:** Anna Levy

My name is Anna T Levy, a resident of Rockville, MD, District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0881, Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions.

Safe and stable housing has far reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. Renters routinely have little agency when faced with threats to maintaining stable housing. As a Jewish person, I am taught that all people should have *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for each person's needs. (Deut. 15:7-8) The home is a critical source of stability for individuals and families. It provides a nexus for social interactions for families, friends, and communities. We know from published research, including that of Matthew Desmond and Princeton's Eviction Lab, that the disruption resulting from evictions contributes to long term physical, psychological, educational, and economic damage that can condemn people to poverty and destabilize communities.

Over 655,000 eviction cases were filed each year pre-pandemic in the State of Maryland among 805,000 renter households and the numbers remain unacceptably high. Evictions create significant costs for state and local government related to funding for shelter and education, as well as health care provided in hospitals instead of by community-based providers, transportation costs for homeless youth, and foster care. Notably, evictions have a disparate impact on Black and brown households in Maryland. Decreasing the number of evictions would help to reduce significant racial inequities and strengthen the financial status of individuals and our communities. Thus, we have an obligation to make sure that people can stay in their homes, especially during a time of pandemic.

There are valid contractual reasons for non-renewal of rental leases. Bill HB0881 would enable local jurisdictions to protect tenants who are fulfilling their contractual obligations so that they can continue to maintain a safe and stable home. Currently, landlords can decide not to renew a tenant's lease for any reason, even when a tenant fully meets their rent and fee obligations and adheres to the terms of their lease. This means that a landlord can force out a tenant who complains about unsafe or unhealthy conditions or because the landlord wants to dramatically raise rents. Additionally, although numbers of evictions due to failure to pay rent have been reduced by emergency rental assistance programs in Maryland, landlords have been able to accept rental assistance for a tenant and then choose not to renew their leases, effectively forcing the tenant to involuntarily search for scarce affordable housing. HB0881 does not negate a landlord's right to not renew the lease of disruptive or delinquent tenants. It simply protects tenants who are doing the right thing to stay in their homes by requiring landlords to provide a

just cause for non-renewal of a lease.

In Montgomery County, where I live, in previous legislative sessions, the Montgomery County Council and the Montgomery County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly have supported this legislation, but approval of the bills was blocked in Annapolis. It is now time to allow local jurisdictions decide if they want to protect their citizens as outlined in HB0881.

**I respectfully urge a strong report from the Committee in support of passage of HB0881.**