



Testimony HB 674
House Environment and Transportation Committee
February 18, 2021
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities. CDN envisions a state in which all communities are thriving and where people of all incomes have abundant opportunities for themselves and their families.

HB 674 will empower Maryland courts to pause eviction proceedings when there is evidence that the tenant is awaiting the outcome of an emergency rental assistance (ERA) application. In 2021 landlords filed nearly 345,000 eviction actions for Failure to Pay Rent, and judges had no power to delay proceedings without landlords' consent -- even when presented evidence that an ERA application was pending or when landlords had refused to accept ERA paychecks. This legislation provides the structural fix. It mandates a stay on Failure to Pay Rent proceedings, on a case by case basis, if a judge is satisfied that a good faith ERA application would resolve the alleged rent debt.

This bill also holds accountable Maryland landlords that are suing renters even while refusing to accept rental assistance. Under HB 674, a refusing landlord would be barred from using the courts to collect the unpaid rent.

Eviction isn't just a byproduct of poverty, but a driver of it. According to "Evicted" author Matthew Desmond's research, a year or more after eviction, families are more likely to experience hardships like hunger or going without electricity. Evicted workers are more likely to get laid off. Children are more likely to miss school. Eviction has had a disproportionate impact on black women who struggle to regain footing for themselves and their children.

COVID-19 pandemic has put hundreds of thousands of Maryland households in desperate conditions. This is the time for reform of the eviction system to protect essential workers who have been hardest hit by COVID-19.

We respectfully request a favorable report for HB 674.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network of Maryland