

Testimony to the House Environment & Transportation Committee

HB 881: Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination

Provisions

Position: Favorable

February 22, 2022

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, HOB
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of HB 881. This bill is enabling legislation that would give clear legislative power to Maryland counties to establish “just cause” or “good cause” limitations on lease non-renewals. This bill expressly grants authority to local legislatures to decide when it is appropriate for rental agreements to be non-renewed. That means local policymakers would be able to determine the kind of “just cause” policy their locality needs, whether by type of building, for certain populations, or under certain circumstances such as a state of emergency. Without HB 881, local efforts are stymied by legal concerns around preemption. We urge the Committee to move HB 881 favorably so that local government can act with clear authority on this issue.

Since 2008, just cause eviction legislation has been introduced in Maryland 8 times – including multiple statewide bills, as well as bills specific to Prince George’s County and Montgomery County. During the COVID-19 state of emergency, Howard County unsuccessfully attempted to prohibit lease non-renewals while Baltimore City passed a short-term provision to require just cause for lease non-renewals until 6 months after the state of emergency’s end. These efforts demonstrate a sustained desire in Maryland localities for just cause policies.

MCRC’s Tenant Advocacy program empowers tenants to advocate for themselves by providing information about housing rights and responsibilities, legal information, mediation, and referrals to other nonprofits and legal services. In 2021, our Tenant Advocacy program received 1271 complaints from Maryland residents statewide. Of those 1271, 800 were related to eviction. We need stronger protections for renters who are struggling now more than ever due to financial hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. HB 881 promotes housing stability by allowing local governments to protect tenants from being evicted unfairly.

For these reasons we support this measure and urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,
Isadora Stern
Policy Advocacy

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