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MAYOR

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**HB 674**

February 22, 2022

**TO:** Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

**FROM:** Natasha Mehu, Director, Office of Government Relations

**RE:** House Bill 674 - Landlord and Tenant – Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 674.

The US was facing a housing crisis long before the COVID-19 pandemic - fueled by the lack of affordable housing, specifically affordable rental units, lack of wage growth, and historic racial inequities embedded in our housing system. It is estimated that pre-pandemic 1 in every 20 households in the US owed rental arrears. In Baltimore, pre-pandemic our rental crisis was above the national average. Pre-pandemic, 1 out of every 10 renters in Baltimore owed rental arrearages.

The pandemic and its disproportionate impact on low income Black and Latinx households quickly exacerbated the housing crisis:

- By April 2020, 1 in every 5 Baltimore households owed rental arrears
- By June 2020, nearly 1 in 3 households in the city owed rental arrears
- DHCD estimates that the number of households owing rental arrears in Baltimore doubled due to the pandemic.

Much like jurisdictions across the country, in June 2020 Baltimore established a temporary rent support program – a short-term initiative with limited reach administered by DHCD. By November 2020, with the influx of local, federal, and state resources, we established the Eviction Prevention program now administered by the Mayor’s Office of Children and Family Success

with support from DHCD, the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, and key partners like the United Way.

As of January 21, 2022, the Baltimore City Community Action Partnership centers team has received more than 27,000 applications for rental assistance; and we have over 5,000 remaining in our queue. As the pandemic rages on and continues to have devastating health and economic impacts on mostly low-wage, front-line workers, timely rental assistance remains critical. Given the sheer demand for assistance and the large need that exists in Baltimore, we prioritize the households most at risk of eviction. To support these households, we have expanded our partnerships to include a partnership with the Courts and the Sheriff's office – to avert pending evictions.

Staying evictions in cases where tenants are awaiting a decision on their rental assistance application will allow the City of Baltimore to expedite much-needed support to tenants facing immediate eviction. Moreover, it will allow our team the ability to connect tenants and landlords to resources for resolving existing rental debts, tenant-landlord mediation, legal support, and as needed, relocation support.

It is our goal to prevent as many evictions as possible, but the extreme impact of the pandemic has overloaded our systems and extended the processing times for applications. Staying evictions for residents seeking rental assistance is just, humane, and the right thing to do to limit the devastating effects of the national housing crisis.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on HB 674.