



# Howard County Council

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Liz Walsh  
Councilmember

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District 1

## Testimony of Howard County Councilmember Liz Walsh before the **Environment and Transportation Committee**

### In SUPPORT of HB0881

February 22, 2022

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the Committee,

I am Liz Walsh, District 1 Councilmember from Howard County. I am here to testify in strong support of HB0881.

In May 2020, a unanimous Howard County Council—four Democrats and one Republican—passed rental stability protections just about as extensive as we thought we could legislate at the local level. No late fees could be charged, no rents could be increased against any residential tenant in the County—including those living in our mobile home parks—for the duration of the then-existing State of Emergency declared by the Governor, through however long that the State of Emergency lasted and three months after its end. Howard County's Rental Protection and Stability Act lapsed in November 2021. For those eighteen months that that law was in effect, those modest protections added to a number of others put in place by our local, State, and federal counterparts—eviction moratoriums mandated by State court, the Governor and federal agency, and rental payment relief aimed at both tenants and landlords—all of them combining to keep our communities stable and whole.

I will share with you what specifically prompted me finding and filing rental protections just in my Howard County. It wasn't just the always-worry of the generations-deep destabilizing that certainly results from even one single eviction or even the then-overwhelming unknown of what new and immediate harm eviction also might exact in the midst of a public health nightmare. It was the calls my District 1 office got almost immediately, just weeks into that first pandemic shutdown, in spring 2020.

From the grown children or the neighbors of decades-long tenants. About our very eldest constituents, some eighty and ninety years old, great-grandmas and grandpas who'd raised families, lived most of their adult lives, in homes they just happened to rent from others. In my Ellicott City. These were good tenants. Never missed a payment. And now in the midst of this once-in-their-lifetime pandemic, they had nowhere particular to go, and

no good way to go about it. Now they had sixty days to extricate their entire lives from their long-time homes. For no particular reason, perhaps. For no just cause. Just got a notice from a landlord to get out. I still get those calls today.

When my D1 office goes to weekly rent court in our District courthouse, when we meet with the non-profits to try to figure out why certain landlords still seem to be filing a disproportionate number of eviction cases even as they're qualifying for and receiving months' worth of rental relief for their tenants' alleged defaults—at least certain of those tenants—we see the disparate impact. We see who's still not getting help. We see the current State-law unbridled concept of “tenant holding over” as a far too expedient, and potentially exploitive, means still to evict. To destabilize.

Thank you Chair Barve and the entire Environment and Transportation Committee for considering this enabling House Bill 0881, co-sponsored by some of our very favorite Howard County representatives: Delegates Ebersole, Hill, and Terrasa and particularly championed by Delegate Wilkins. Once passed, this State enabling law would allow a locality like mine—if we so needed, if we so choose to—to opt into a better definition of what housing stability in our hometowns should look like, what it should be.

Please support HB0881.