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February 25, 2022

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Environment & Transportation Committee
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill (HB) 1064 – Real Property – Actions for Possession – Pet Protections.

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important Bill. Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to Maryland's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including family law, housing, public benefits, consumer law (e.g., bankruptcy and debt collection), and criminal record expungements to remove barriers to obtaining child custody and housing, a driver's license, and employment. This letter serves as notice that Donna Bernstein, Esq. will testify on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid at the request of Delegate Dana Stein.

MLA supports HB 1064 and asks that this committee give it a favorable report with amendments. This amendment would increase the likelihood that pets left behind are safe and given a better chance of reuniting with their caretaker. They would also increase the likelihood of low-income pet owners accessing valuable information and resources to improve the quality of life for both the pet owner and the pet.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for pets to be left behind, even those considered valued family members and an essential source of companionship and comfort. Without access to resources that can provide information and assistance with the eviction process and/or finding pet-friendly housing to move to before an eviction, low-income Marylanders are left struggling to understand the eviction process and their rights as the process quickly moves along. Finding new housing, particularly pet-friendly housing, under these circumstances can be difficult, and a low-income person without information or transportation to move their pet to a safe place may feel they have no other option but to leave without their pet(s). The pets ultimately left behind are by no means only dogs and cats. They include rabbits, gerbils, hamsters, birds, and more.

This Bill would create a process to look for and keep safe those pets a tenant (caretaker) has left behind for one reason or another. By requiring that the caretaker be provided with the contact information for the place where their pet was taken, and requiring that the facility which has taken in the pet be provided with the contact information of the caretaker, the chances of reuniting the pet and caretaker are greatly enhanced. When pets

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are reunited with their caretaker, that makes space for another animal that needs to go into that shelter, and it reduces the likelihood of euthanasia as the result of an inadequate room in a shelter. Every opportunity should be taken to bring about these results.

MLA suggests an amendment that in cases where the property is returned to the landlord without the use of the judicial process, such as when a tenant's lease ends or is not renewed, the landlord is required to keep the "fact sheet" on hand and follow the same process that the sheriff, constable, or other officials, must follow, including contacting an animal shelter or animal rescue organization to take possession of the pet, providing that entity with the contact information for the caretaker, and if possible providing that caretaker with the contact information for the entity where the pet was taken. This process will make it more likely that the pet left behind will be kept safe and not suffer.

Thank you for considering this written testimony. For the reasons stated above, MLA urges a favorable report with amendments on HB 1064.

Sincerely,

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