



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 928
Discrimination in Housing - Citizenship, Immigration Status, and National Origin**

Maryland is home to more than 915,000 immigrants.¹ Yet our state's anti-discrimination laws do not provide explicit protections for immigrants or naturalized citizens from discrimination in housing.

Immigrants sometimes face discrimination from landlords, who may refuse to rent to a prospective tenant because of their immigration status or who may report or threaten to report tenants to ICE as a scare tactic. This tactic is used to pressure tenants to pay their rent or to pressure tenants into enduring inadequate housing conditions.^{2,3}

Housing is a human right, yet over history it has often been denied to vulnerable populations due to long-persisting discriminatory practices.⁴ The Federal Fair Housing Act and Maryland's Fair Housing statute were enacted to protect residents against housing discrimination based on race, gender, religion, and other characteristics. Current state law, however, fails to explicitly protect Marylanders from housing discrimination on the basis of citizenship or immigration status.

The Maryland Commission for Civil Rights, the state agency that oversees and settles disputes between landlords and tenants concerning housing discrimination, is in support of HB 928 as it would clarify the state's fair housing statute in ensuring the agency has appropriate jurisdiction and that cases involving citizenship and immigration status do not fall through the cracks.

Other jurisdictions have enacted these protections for immigrant tenants, including the states of Colorado, California, Illinois, and Washington, as well as Prince George's County⁵ and the City of Annapolis.⁴

¹ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-maryland>

² "Citizenship, immigration status added to Annapolis fair housing law." Capital Gazette.
<https://www.capitalgazette.com/maryland/annapolis/ac-cn-council-0513-story.html>

³ "Threat to Report Tenant to ICE May Cost Landlord \$17,000." The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/23/nyregion/immigrants-tenants-rights.html>

⁴ "Racial Discrimination in the U.S. Housing and Mortgage Lending Markets: A Quantitative Review of Trends, 1976–2016." L. Quillian, J. Lee, and B. Honoré, 2020.

⁵ Prince George's County Code, Subtitle 2 §2-210.

What This Bill Does

- Bars landlords from requesting information relating to citizenship or immigration status.
- Bars landlords from disclosing or threatening to disclose a tenant's citizenship or immigration status to another person or to a law enforcement agency.
- Provides tenants who face discrimination with legal recourse through the Maryland Commission for Civil Rights.

The bill would not prevent a landlord from:

- Seeking to collect information from the tenant to determine eligibility for government housing programs.
- Seeking to collect information from the tenant to verify their ability to afford rental housing or to verify their identity, including performing a tenant screening check.
- Otherwise enforcing a rental agreement or law.