



**HB0881 - Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies -  
Local Just Cause Termination Provisions**

**Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee,  
Feb. 22, 2022**

**Position: SUPPORT (FAV)**

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Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (CPSR) is statewide evidenced-based, organization of over 900 physicians, other health professionals and supporters, that addresses the existential public health threats: nuclear weapons, the climate crisis and the issues of pollution and toxics' effect on health as seen through the intersectional lens of environmental, social and racial justice. As an organization founded by physicians, we understand that prevention is far superior to treatment in reducing

HB0881 is enabling legislation that would give clear legislating 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 HB0881, local efforts are stymied by legal concerns around preemption. We urge the Committee to move HB0881 favorably so that local government can act with clear authority on this issue.

There is evidence from California that "just cause" legislation resulted in a significant reduction in evictions in 4 cities studied by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University.

<https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/effect-just-cause-eviction-ordinances-eviction-four-california-cities>

Reducing evictions where there is no just cause will have a positive impact on the mental and physical health of those at risk. Baltimore has an extremely high rate of evictions adding to the misery of too many people in this city. Counties, cities should have the right to enact "just cause laws" if it is decided that it would be beneficial. Evictions cause a significant and lasting increase in homelessness, and an increase use of emergency rooms, mental health problems, and mortality. [https://economics.nd.edu/assets/303258/jmp\\_rcollinson\\_1\\_.pdf](https://economics.nd.edu/assets/303258/jmp_rcollinson_1_.pdf) Those brought before courts for eviction are disproportionately Black. A study in Massachusetts before the pandemic

found the [mortality rate](#) of the unsheltered was 10 x the mortality rate of the statewide housed populations. Low-income women of color are the highest risk population.

<http://www.aspenepic.org/a-glimpse-into-the-eviction-crisis-why-housing-stability-deserves-greater-attention/> In an Abell foundation study in Baltimore rent court, of 300 people surveyed, an astounding 94% of those interviewed were black, 79% women and 65% lived with children.

<https://abell.org/sites/default/files/files/cd-justicivediverted216.pdf>

Even without this pandemic, housing is health. Inadequate housing is associated with chronic asthma, is dangerous for children 's development especially for those under 5. Young children exposed to overcrowding and/or multiple moves in one year, were more often reported by their caregivers to have poor health, impaired educational, social or emotional skills, and were measured to have low weight compared to other children. <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/effect-just-cause-eviction-ordinances-eviction-four-california-cities>

In older children and adolescents, a history of multiple moves has been associated with mental health problems later in life including violence and suicide.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379716301180>

Homelessness can be deadly. The homeless have a 5-10 x higher mortality than the housed with average life expectancy was 53 years on one study out of Boston. And this is before the Covid-19. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2687991>

Housing the homeless and providing health care is cost effective based on a study in Massachusetts that preceded Covid-19. [https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SocialDeterminantsofHealth\\_2014.pdf](https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SocialDeterminantsofHealth_2014.pdf)

[https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SocialDeterminantsofHealth\\_2014.pdf](https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SocialDeterminantsofHealth_2014.pdf)

Estimates are that homeless people who become sick with COVID-19 are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die than the general population. [https://works.bepress.com/dennis\\_culhane/237/](https://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/237/) A more recent report has the mortality rate 75% higher for the homeless than the housed in NYC.

<https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/age-adjusted-mortality-rate-for-sheltered-homeless-new-yorkers/>

### ***What is “just cause” policy?***

When it comes to lease non-renewals, Maryland is currently a "no cause" state – that is, a landlord can decide to non-renew without any stated cause. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They are under constant pressure to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities.

HB0881 enables Maryland counties to pass local "just cause" laws that limit lease non-renewals. "Just cause" means that a landlord may choose not to renew an expiring lease only if there is an acceptable basis for that decision. HB0881 defines “just cause,” including an inclusive but non-exhaustive list of acceptable bases – such as substantial lease violations, illegal activities, removal of the property from the market, or personal use of the property by the

owner. HB0881's list reflects the policies other U.S. jurisdictions that have enacted just cause policy. *It is, however, a list that localities are free to adopt or change, as localities see fit.*

### ***Where is the interest in “just cause eviction”?***

Since 2008, just cause eviction legislation has been introduced in 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.

Washington, D.C. (since 1985) and Philadelphia (since 2018) have adopted just cause eviction policies, and the state of New Jersey, too (since 1974). New Jersey’s policy endeavor over many decades demonstrates that the benefit of just cause far outweighs the hypothetical that it hurts development. [“Something in the Garden State is clearly working. According to data from the Eviction Lab, New Jersey cities such as Trenton, Paterson, Jersey City, and West New York have among the lowest eviction rates in the country. Meanwhile, construction is absolutely exploding.”](#)

HB0881 recognizes that local legislatures want to aid their renters in achieving stable housing so that they are able contribute long-term to the workforce and the local economy. Requiring just cause as a precondition for an eviction can be a tailored policy that boosts the stability of the housing market by stabilizing families, neighborhoods, and communities. HB0881 ensures local legislatures can pass enforceable laws whereby no one is arbitrarily deprived of their housing.

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility is a member of the Renters United Maryland, a statewide coalition of renters, organizers, and advocates, and **we urge the Committee’s report of Favorable on HB0881.**

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