



**Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony in Support of SB279
Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Alteration
Wednesday, February 9, 2022**

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair; The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher; and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Tiffany Jones, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County's federally designated anti-poverty group, is in full support of SB279 and asks the Committee for a favorable report. Support for renters' rights has been a longstanding priority for our board. Lower-income households are the most vulnerable when it comes to housing stability, especially in an area like Montgomery County where the cost of housing is so high.

If passed, the bill would:

- Provide funding for the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program administered by the MLSC to fully implement access to legal representation in evictions and other related proceedings in the State.
- Alter the contents of the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund to include money received by the Division of Consumer Protection in the Office of the Attorney General from a settlement, an agreement, or a judgment relating to a certain investigation or enforcement of the Maryland Consumer Protection Act.

As advocates for the low-income community, our board supports SB279 because it would help to ensure a fairer process for households facing eviction. Protections for renters are critical in areas like ours where the cost of living is so high and affordable housing is so hard to find. Over half of all renters in the County are housing burdened and 63.7% of households with annual incomes of less than \$75,000 are housing burdened.¹ For households who face eviction, legal representation is essential and can mean the difference between housing and homelessness. The funding provided in the bill will help to ensure that more residents can access legal services in evictions proceedings, which could deter wrongful evictions and decrease rates of homelessness.

We ask the Committee members to vote in support of this bill and to continue to explore policies that will help Marylanders find and maintain affordable housing.

¹ <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>