

SB0662, Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund - Funding
Favorable Testimony

To: Chair Smith, Chair Guzzone, members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee
From: Arielle Juberg, Baltimore, MD 21234

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), which brings people together in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. SURJ is working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland and Renters United. I am testifying in **support** of SB0662, Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Funding.

SB0662 would transfer \$11,800,000 from the Abandoned Property Fund to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Fund for FY2023.

I support SB0662 because I believe this essential program must be adequately funded. Without sufficient funding, last session's legislation will mean little to the tenants who cannot afford counsel in rent court. In the 2021 legislative session, HB0018 created a right to counsel program to provide low-income tenants across the state with access to legal representation in eviction proceedings. The law went into effect October 1, 2021, creating the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force.

Relying on court data and analysis from Stout Risius Ross, the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) estimates there are 29,683 limited-income residents who have an unmet need for legal representation in eviction cases. MLSC estimates that with an additional allocation of \$11.8 million for FY 23, the State can meet approximately 1/3 of that need. This funding is only part of the puzzle, but it is an essential part of ensuring low-income renters aren't displaced and forced into a state of homelessness.

It is critical that state money be allocated so that renters have access to counsel, since, according to the Task Force, *“over 90% of housing providers are represented and over 90% of tenants are not.”* This is especially difficult for female-headed households and black households, who were evicted 46% and 195% more frequently than their male and white households respectively in Baltimore City. The legislature already affirmed the belief that unequal access to counsel in eviction cases is not a just state of things. Without adequate funding, that affirmation will remain a hollow promise to Marylanders who need these services.

We must remedy this issue in order to give low-income tenants a fair opportunity to present their case in rent court. It is for these reasons I am strongly encouraging you to vote **in support** of SB0662. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service.