

Testimony of Deric Strickland and Tonaé Watkins in support of SB 384, Landlord and Tenant – Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination

Judiciary Proceedings Committee Hearing on February 15, 2022

Position: Favorable

My name is Deric Strickland. I live with my wife, Tonaé Watkins, and our two daughters, ages 6 and 2, at Winston Apartments. There are over 150 units in our complex. The complex is managed by Apartment Services Inc., which manages apartments throughout the Baltimore metro area. Like many of our neighbors, our family has struggled to pay rent during COVID, our landlord has refused to accept rental assistance, and we are standing on the edge of eviction.

Before COVID, I was working at a warehouse, and we paid the rent timely each month. We were a two-income household, and we were even able to send one of our daughters to private school so that she could have the best education possible. When COVID hit, I had to quit my job to take care of our two children who were forced to stay at home. My wife has been picking up as many shifts as possible during the day at a grocery store and in the evenings at a local restaurant, but it has not been enough. We've managed to pay some of the rent that is due by borrowing from friends and family and by ignoring certain other bills. We are constantly receiving eviction notices and constantly paying just enough to stay in the property. But we can't dig out of the hole without help.

We applied for rental assistance with the Baltimore City Community Action Partnership back in August of 2021. We provided numerous documents and answered all of the questions. And then we waited only to be told months later by the landlord's agent that they're not accepting rental assistance. They also couldn't be bothered to fix the hot water timely. We had little-to-no hot water throughout December 2021. Our apartment complex is still overrun with mice despite our best efforts. And, our stove is barely functional.

Every time an eviction is scheduled for our unit, our landlord sends constant eviction notices and post them to our door in full view of everyone in the complex. In a single day we have received five eviction notices for the same case. Along with the eviction notices, we often get the contact numbers for rental assistance programs, which feels like a cruel joke when the landlord is refusing to cooperate with rental assistance programs in the first place. I don't know how much longer my family can keep paying to stay in our home when there is a valid rental assistance application waiting for our landlord to cooperate and help our family get back on our feet.

Please support SB 384.