



MARYLAND
LEGAL AID

Advancing
Human Rights and
Justice for All

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February 22, 2022

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 629 Landlord and Tenant
– Eviction Data- Collection and Distribution**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 629. This bill would require Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development to collect and distribute statewide eviction information in a database available to the public. Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a private, non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to indigent Maryland residents. From 12 offices around the state, MLA helps individuals and families in every Maryland county with many civil legal issues, including housing, consumer, public benefits, and family law matters. MLA also represents abused and neglected children and provides legal assistance to senior citizens and nursing home residents. This letter serves as notice that Gregory Countess, Esq. will testify on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid at the request of Senator Susan Lee.

While evictions are happening throughout the country, Maryland's data regarding eviction is notably lacking. Princeton's Eviction Lab, in tracking evictions nationwide, only found complete data for Garrett, Caroline, and Prince Georges¹ counties. This is in stark comparison to the multitude of states where the Eviction Lab found accurate and complete eviction data. While complete data is lacking, MLA attorneys' observations in courtrooms across the state reveal that evictions are happening and that many of these evictions can be avoided. Studies carried out by the Public Justice Center concluded that, in Baltimore City alone, pre-pandemic, over 6,000 evictions occur every year. To create solutions to Maryland's eviction problems, a centralized, "one stop" source of eviction data is necessary.

The price of eviction is high on the individual and society. Without a home, it is hard for an individual to stay employed, it is hard for a student to succeed in school, and it may be impossible for a family to find a safe and warm place to live. An eviction is an event that is more than an inconvenience. It is devastating and a threat to a person's human rights. Housing instability also

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destroys communities, removing long-standing neighbors and friends and changing the culture of an area. Ultimately, the state bears the cost of this devastation and often takes on the cost of providing shelter and aid to the now homeless families. With the burdensome cost of eviction falling on individuals, communities, and the state, Maryland has a moral obligation to track evictions and a fiscal imperative.

Currently, there is no "one-stop" source for eviction data. While the Maryland Judiciary has information on eviction filings, this aggregate data reveals no information about actual evictions. Some Maryland sheriffs track evictions, but this is not universal, and each sheriff's office uses a different format. Such incomplete and disparate data obscures the reality of eviction in Maryland. Without accurate information, the impact eviction has across Maryland and the needs it creates in communities cannot be understood, measured, or addressed.

SB 629 would give stakeholders the information desperately needed to address housing instability in Maryland by providing a one-stop, publicly available source for eviction data. Housing instability has plagued this state for too long, and passing this bill is one of the necessary first steps to addressing the problem. For these reasons, MLA respectfully requests that you give a favorable report on SB 629.

Sincerely,

/S/

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