



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *Senate Bill 662* –
Access to Counsel In Evictions Special Fund - Funding
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 22, 2022**

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly throughout the entire Greater Washington area to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents, support our Jewish day schools and community centers, and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the entire Jewish community.

The JCRC recognizes that the right to counsel has a myriad of benefits for tenants and the communities they live in. Studies have shown that tenants with legal representation are much more likely to avoid an eviction judgment than unrepresented tenants. Additionally, attorneys may be able to keep eviction filings off tenants' records, arrange for alternative housing, and help tenants apply for rental assistance. The JCRC is committed to equity and justice for all in legal proceedings, thereby ensuring tenants have the right to legal representation in any eviction-related case.

Senate Bill 662 – Access to Counsel In Evictions Special Fund - requires the Comptroller to distribute \$11,800,000 of certain abandoned property funds to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund for fiscal year 2023. An allocation of \$11.8 million dollars in FY23 could help more than 9700 Maryland families avoid disruptive displacement in eviction actions. In 2021, the JCRC supported legislation for Maryland to become one of the first states to guarantee legal representation for income-eligible renters facing eviction - but only when there's funding. Tenants' attorneys have helped stave off the worst of the eviction crisis by enforcing "moratorium" protections, local emergency ordinances, and rental assistance agreements. SB 662 is the next step, ensuring that in 2022, the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special program is funded so that legal representation is provided, and in so doing, will help support tenants who face eviction. For these reasons, we ask the committee for a favorable report on SB 662.

Evictions have a disparate impact on black and brown households in the State and exacerbate the public health crisis due to Covid-19. Providing a right to counsel to tenants in eviction cases is a proven means of preventing the disruptive displacement of families and the resulting social, economic, and public health costs of such displacement.

e For these reasons, we ask the committee to give a favorable report to HB 712.