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MAYOR

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SB 564

February 22, 2022

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director, Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 564 – Landlord and Tenant and Wrongful Detainer Actions – Eviction Prevention Services

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 564.

A history of structural racism and concentrated poverty made housing instability a reality in Baltimore City long before COVID-19. In March 2020, 1 in 10 Baltimore tenants was behind on rent. Within a month of the onset of the pandemic, that rate doubled to 1 in 5. By June 2020, it was 1 in 3.

Much like jurisdictions across the country, in June 2020, Baltimore established a temporary rent support program – a short-term initiative with limited reach administered by the City's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). By November 2020, with the influx of local, federal, and state resources, we established the Eviction Prevention program now administered by the Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success with support from DHCD, the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, and key partners like the United Way.

As of January 21, 2022, the Baltimore City Community Action Partnership centers team has received more than 27,000 applications for rental assistance; and we have over 5,000 remaining in our queue.

This legislation would instruct courts to provide a recess on the trial date of a residential eviction so that a renter may access legal services or rental assistance programs. Allowing additional opportunities for tenants to access resources the City has available through its eviction

prevention efforts could prevent evictions from happening unnecessarily on the day of the trial when resources are available to address the need.

Instructing courts to provide a recess on the trial date of an eviction case so that a renter may access rental assistance programs or legal services, will allow the City of Baltimore to continue to direct its eviction prevention efforts where needed – and prevent more families from becoming unhoused. Moreover, it will allow our team the ability to connect tenants and landlords to resources for resolving existing rental debts, tenant-landlord mediation, legal support, and as needed, relocation support.

It is our goal to prevent as many evictions as possible and allowing opportunity for tenants to access resources when it matters most – at court – will help keep people housed and limit the devastating effects of the national housing crisis.

The BCA respectfully requests a **favorable report** on SB 564.