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FACSIMILE NO.

WRITER'S DIRECT DIAL NO.

February 21, 2022

To: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Brian E. Frosh
Attorney General

Re: Senate Bill 662 – Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund - Funding (SUPPORT)

The Office of the Attorney General supports Senate Bill 662 sponsored by Senator Craig J. Zucker, *et al.* Senate Bill 662 would appropriate the necessary initial funding for the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund (the “Fund”). Providing the Fund with an initial appropriation of \$11.8 million is essential to fulfilling the aims and goals of the General Assembly in enacting House Bill 18 in 2021.

Absent funding, renters will continue to overwhelmingly face eviction actions without counsel. As of January 2022, 62% of Maryland renters believe they are somewhat or very likely to be evicted within the next two months.¹ Eviction, or a mere threat of eviction, is “associated with numerous mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, exposure to violence, mental health hospitalization, and suicide.”² Eviction is particularly “traumatizing to children and affects emotional and physical well-being and development for years, if not for lifetimes.”³ Without adequate funding for access to counsel, Maryland renters will continue to experience the detrimental emotional and physical effects the General Assembly sought to avoid last session by enacting House Bill 18. Accordingly, the Office of the Attorney General requests that the Judicial Proceedings Committee give Senate Bill 662 a favorable report.

cc: The Honorable Craig J. Zucker, *et al.*
Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

¹ January 2022, US Census Household Pulse Survey Week 42 Housing Tab 3b, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp41.html>

² Emily A. Benerfer et al., *Eviction, Health Inequity, and the Spread of COVID-19: Housing Policy as a Primary Pandemic Mitigation Strategy*, J. URB. HEALTH 1, 4 (last revised Dec. 7, 2020).

³ *Id.*