



**MARYLAND
LEGAL AID**

Advancing
**Human Rights and
Justice for All**

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March 1, 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 (SB) 816 – Real Property – Actions
for Possession – Pet Protections.**

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to Maryland's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including family law, housing, public benefits, consumer law (e.g., bankruptcy and debt collection), and criminal record expungements to remove barriers to obtaining child custody and housing, a driver's license, and employment. Maryland Legal Aid supports SB 816 and asks that this committee give it a favorable report.

MLA recommends two amendments which would both increase the likelihood that pets left behind are kept safe and given a better chance of reuniting with their caretaker, and would also increase the likelihood of low-income pet owners accessing valuable information and resources to improve quality of life for both the pet owner and their pet. This letter serves as notice that Donna Bernstein, Esq. will testify in support of Senate Bill 816 on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid at the request of Senator Susan Lee.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for pets to be left behind, even those considered valued family members and an essential source of companionship and comfort. Without access to resources that can provide information and assistance with the eviction process and/or finding pet-friendly housing to move to before an eviction, low-income Marylanders are left struggling to understand the eviction process and their rights as the process quickly moves along. Finding new housing, particularly pet-friendly housing, under these circumstances can be so tricky that a low-income person without information or transportation to move their pet to a safe place may feel they have no other option but to leave without their pet(s). The pets ultimately left behind are by no means only dogs and cats. They include rabbits, gerbils, hamsters, birds, and more.

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MLA supports this Bill because it would set up a process to look for and keep safe those pets a tenant (caretaker) has left behind for one reason or another. By so doing, it prevents the suffering of those pets. By requiring that the caretaker be provided with the contact information for the place where their pet was taken, and requiring that the facility which has taken in the pet be provided with the contact information of the caretaker, the chances of reuniting the pet and caretaker are greatly enhanced. When pets are reunited with their caretaker, that makes space for another animal that needs to go into that shelter, reducing the likelihood of euthanasia due to inadequate space in a shelter, every opportunity should be taken to bring about these results. Therefore, MLA would recommend that in those cases where the property is returned to the landlord without the use of the judicial process, such as when a tenant's lease ends or is not renewed, the landlord be required to keep the "fact sheet" on hand and follow the same process that the sheriff, constable, or other officials, must follow, including contacting an animal shelter or animal rescue organization to take possession of the pet, providing that entity with the contact information for the caretaker, and if possible providing that caretaker with the contact information for the entity where the pet was taken. This makes it more likely that the pet left behind will be kept safe and not suffer.

Thank you for considering this written testimony. For the reasons stated above, MLA urges a favorable report on SB 816 with amendments.

Sincerely,

/s/ Donna B. Bernstein

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