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SB0629 – Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Data - Collection and Distribution

**Hearing before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,
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Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that serves over 600 renters each year. We stand with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing. PJC seeks the Committee's Favorable report on SB0629.

Maryland lacks a centralized source of timely, geocoded data about evictions. SB0629 requires the Maryland Judiciary to collect data on enforcement of warrants used for residential evictions and requires further that the Judiciary share that data with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) every 2 weeks. DHCD would then make eviction data available to state agencies or academic institutions.

Since mid-2020, the Maryland Judiciary has been publishing monthly statistics about court filings, warrants, and evictions. These reports are published on mdcourts.gov in a static format (PDF) with around 60 days' lag time between publications. The data are organized by county and case type (including Failure To Pay Rent, Tenant Holding Over, Breach of Lease, and Wrongful Detainer).

SB0629 expands on the Judiciary's recent efforts to make eviction data accessible. This bill would ensure that eviction data include ZIP code and census tract information about each eviction. The date of evictions would also be collected and reported. Additionally, data about warrants and actual evictions would include identification of the type of legal action that resulted in those outcomes. Finally, SB0629 would not only provide public access to these data on a data dashboard updated monthly, but also make raw data sets available to state agencies and academic institutions. All of these features are currently missing from the Judiciary's current data sharing efforts.

Notably, SB0629 does not contemplate the collection or reporting of any personal identifiers about the defendants in eviction or foreclosure actions nor even the case numbers of the actions.

This bill also builds on improving practices already demonstrated in Baltimore City and Montgomery County. Since 2018, the Sheriff of Baltimore City has standardized a practice of inputting daily

information about the execution of warrants into spreadsheet format, capturing even more data than those mandated under SB0629. The Sheriff of Montgomery County worked with the County's Office of Legislative Oversight in 2018 to deliver a comprehensive statistical study of evictions, including a geospatial analysis.

Open data will open pathways to anti-displacement innovations.

SB0629 propels Maryland toward a research focus on housing displacement. Data will provide all stakeholders a vital new perspective on the prevalence, concentrations, and temporal shifts in eviction at ZIP code and census tract levels, which are often used in sociological, public health, and other studies. Data should be the driver behind appropriations and distribution of financial assistance to prevent evictions. It should illuminate intersections between displacement and health, education, and voting power. It should help to measure whether a civil right to counsel in eviction cases would effectively save cities revenue compared to post-eviction interventions.

While the already-available numbers about Maryland court filings tells us that cases predominate in Prince George's County, Baltimore County, and Baltimore City, geocoded eviction data would provide stakeholders a detailed and comparative picture of evictions by city, ZIP, census tract, neighborhood, legislative district, and so on. SB 544 can lead to concrete demonstrations of how eviction impacts discrete communities. The data can help mobilize those communities and open new avenues to policy change – not only in housing and community development, but in adjacent arenas.

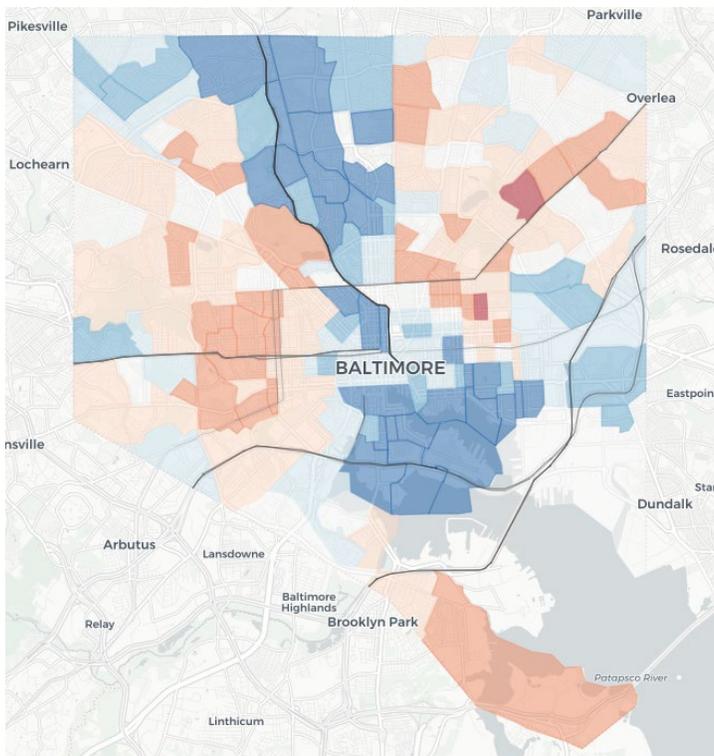


Figure 1: Baltimore Eviction Risk Map Jan 2018-June 2019, available at <https://evictions.study/maryland/maps/baltimore.html>

Address data made available by the Baltimore City Sheriff to University of California at Berkley and University of Washington researchers resulted in a 2020 analysis and mapping of eviction risk by neighborhood. This visualization can be paired with others provided by the existing Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance. It can also cross-reference with existing 311 data maintained by the city.

Public Justice Center is a member of the Renters United Maryland coalition and asks that the Committee **issue a FAVORABLE report on SB0629**. If you have any questions, please contact Zafar Shah, shahz@publicjustice.org, (410) 625-9409 Ext. 237.

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