

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA)

Subject: Senate Bill 662 - Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Funding

Date: February 22, 2022

Position: Support

The Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) joins its partner, the Maryland Access to Justice Commission (A2JC), and supports **Senate Bill 662 - Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Funding**. Senate Bill 662 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.

MSBA represents more attorneys than any other organization across the State in all practice areas. MSBA serves as the voice of Maryland's legal profession. Through its Laws Committee and various practice-specific sections, MSBA monitors and takes positions on legislation of importance to the legal profession.

MSBA represents tens of thousands of attorneys and supports access to justice for Marylanders and funding of the justice system. MSBA knows that attorneys matter. The experiences of other jurisdictions that have implemented access to counsel prove that in a potentially complex process like eviction that has such harsh consequences, especially during a pandemic, attorneys can be the difference between someone having a home and not.

Since the start of COVID-19, MSBA, A2JC, and justice partners worked hard to secure emergency funding to make up for the 70% decline in civil legal aid funding. During the 2021 legislative session, we successfully advocated for \$9 million to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to fund a diversity of civil legal aid programs through the state. In 2020, through the work of the COVID-19 Task Force, we succeeded in advocating for \$11.7 million in funding from Governor Hogan and Attorney General Frosh.

MSBA and A2JC recently supported and secured the passage of the legal right to counsel in eviction matters, to help many Maryland renters negatively impacted by the pandemic.

SB 662 would grant additional civil legal aid funding for those facing eviction, through a distribution of \$11.8 million of abandoned property funds to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund. MSBA supports and advocates for ongoing funding and support of civil legal aid initiatives, particularly those that would provide critical services to Marylanders most impacted by the pandemic.

For the reasons stated above, MSBA **supports** SB 662 and respectfully requests a **favorable report**. For additional information, please feel free to contact Shaoli Katana at MSBA at shaoli@msba.org.