
BILL NO: Senate Bill 223
TITLE: Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Actions – Filing Surcharge and Prohibited Lease Provisions
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: February 3, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland (WLC) is a statewide, non-profit legal services provider, dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, the economic security, and the bodily autonomy of women across Maryland. Our direct legal services include representing survivors of domestic violence in protective order hearings, family law matters, and immigration proceedings. The WLC advances its work not only through direct legal representation, but also through statewide educational hotlines and advocacy.

Senate Bill 223 was developed by the Attorney General through the COVID 19 Task Force on Access to Justice, a partnership between the Maryland Attorney General's Office and the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, developing strategies and solutions addressing the significant civil legal challenges facing Marylanders in the wake of COVID-19. It would bring filing fees in landlord tenant cases closer in line with surcharges filed in other states, which in turn would help reduce the number of eviction proceedings filings, while at the same time increasing funding for an Access to Counsel. Proceeds would go to support civil legal services, in particular representation in eviction proceedings.

Domestic and sexual violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, and the need for safe and affordable housing is one of the most pressing concerns for survivors of violence and abuse. Many survivors face unique barriers to accessing affordable housing due to the power and control dynamics involved in these types of relationships, such as being evicted for calling the police or because the batterer caused a disturbance at the dwelling. A right to counsel in such eviction proceedings can play a critical role in ensuring survivor safety and economic stability.

For these reasons, the WLC supports SB223 and urges a favorable report.

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.