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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson
SB 529: Real Property – Landlord and Tenant – Bedbugs

Good afternoon Chairman Smith and Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee. Today I present to you SB 529 a bill that is important to the health and well-being of Maryland's citizens.

The primary purpose of this bill is to reconstruct the process in which a tenant will notify a landlord that their dwelling contains bedbugs. Consequently, the act of reporting the presence of bedbugs requires the landlord to obtain an inspection. Additionally, the tenant should retain sufficient evidence that the landlord received the notice. Once the information is received, the landlord should, within 96 hours of notification order and obtain an inspection of the dwelling unit by a certified professional. Once the dwelling unit is inspected, and determined to contain bedbugs in any stage of life, the certified applicator should report the written findings to the landlord within 24 hours of the inspection. As soon as possible and practical, the landlord should provide the tenant with the written inspection results. In addition, if the inspection determines the presence of bedbugs, the landlord should immediately inspect all continuous dwelling units on the property. However, if the inspection determines that no bedbugs are in the reported unit or any of the continuous units on the property the owner should inform the tenant that they may contact the local health department about any remaining concerns about the suspected presence of bedbugs.

Furthermore, if the inspection does reveal the presence of bedbugs in any stage of life, the landlord shall commence reasonable measures within five (5) days of receiving the written notice from the certified applicator. These measures should include how to effectively treat the bedbug presence, and the steps required to retain the services of a certified applicator to treat the dwelling unit and any continuous units owned by the landlord.

I share with you that I am both disturbed and heartbroken by the experience of a third grader who has been affected tremendously by bedbug infestations. This child had been attending school and attempting to learn while continuously scratching the numerous bedbug bites on his body. These bites that occurred at night while he was sleeping had become bloody scars and scabs on his body. While basic measures, such as spraying and even removing the bed covers and the mattress were taken to exterminate the bedbug problem they did not alleviate the issue. No child or family should have their daily life, health and well-being disturbed by bedbugs, and not have the most effective and proper measures taken to diminish the problem.

Studies from Chicago have shown that this bill's substructure is productive and reduces bedbug populations while also adding the benefit of minimizing evictions. Maryland has become a state with obsolete bedbug policies, thus ranking the Baltimore and DC metropolitan areas 5th and 7th on Orkin Pest Control's top bedbug cities. Maryland's current outdated laws allow landlords to place blame on tenants for bed bug infestations and convey any expenses that the bed bug removal may bring to tenants. That is called "fault-based standards" and causes disputes and delays treatment of the bed bugs making the problem harder to solve and even more costly. Additionally, trying to find the immediate problem of a bed bug infestation, especially in a multi-unit facility, this is nearly impossible to do.

This bill would ensure that proper measures are in place and taken to handle bed bugs for tenants in the State of Maryland. It limits the neglect a landlord can have if bedbugs are reported to be in the dwelling unit while also giving tenants and landlords a guideline to follow to best secure the health and safety of the living spaces in which they occupy. Bed bugs are a public health crisis, and they do cause a variety of physical health, mental health, and economic consequences. Tenants should not be subject to such dangerous conditions with the expectations and paying to live in safe and clean environments.

Thus, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 529. Thank you.