



*Connecting Low-Income
Individuals and Families who
need Civil Legal Services with
Volunteer Attorneys and
Community Resources*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Timothy Abeska, Esq.
Holland Brownley, Esq.

Rebecca Burner
Sarah Dahl, Esq.
Tawes Harper
James McComb

Stephanie A. Shipley, Esq.
Judith Showalter, Esq.

Michael Starling
Ruth Thomas

Samantha Bowers Welte
Doncella Wilson

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Meredith L. Girard, Esq.

8 SOUTH WEST STREET
EASTON, MARYLAND 21601
PHONE: 410-690-8128
FAX: 443-385-0210

205 S. CROSS STREET
CHESTERTOWN, MD 21620
PHONE: 443.298.9425

WWW.MIDSHOREPROBONO.ORG

February 21, 2022

BILL NO: SB564 – Landlord and Tenant and Wrongful Detainer Action
– Eviction Prevention Services

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

FROM: Mid-Shore Pro Bono, Inc.

POSITION: SUPPORT

Mid-Shore Pro Bono (MSPB) recommends a favorable report on SB564. By removing barriers to accessing legal counsel and other services, tenants have a greater opportunity to work with landlords to resolve issues and avoid eviction.

Mid-Shore Pro Bono, Inc. is a Maryland nonprofit that connects people on the Eastern Shore with limited financial means to legal representation and throughout essential community resources. Each year, MSPB helps over 3,000 of our community's most vulnerable people access the legal system in times of need. Our network of volunteer lawyers provides free legal services on elder law, family law, landlord/tenant, mortgage foreclosure, and consumer debt. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure home environments for children, which is especially important in times of crisis.

During the pandemic, MSPB responded to the dramatically increased need for representation in landlord tenant cases by providing in-court legal assistance, including day of court representation, in Eastern Shore courthouses. Our experience is that when tenants have access to legal representation, the outcomes are better for the tenant in nearly every circumstance. However, tenants face a multitude of barriers to accessing legal counsel prior to their court date including lack of technology or transportation, not enough time after receiving the court notice to obtain counsel through free and low-cost services organizations, or challenges connecting with legal service providers due to work schedules. It takes Mid-Shore Pro Bono 7 to 10 days for a case to be placed through our network of volunteers.

Same day representation provided by legal services organizations, like Mid-Shore Pro Bono, is often the tenant's first opportunity to learn their rights and understand their defenses. This bill would allow tenants to have time to meet with an attorney to understand their rights and potential defenses, and to accommodate requests for a continuance when more time is needed to gather evidence and documents. Many courts are accustomed to moving quickly through the landlord tenant docket, especially those with a high volume of cases. If a tenant is not inside the courtroom when their case is called, the tenant may be deprived them of the opportunity to present a defense or request more time. A judgment for failure to pay rent or wrongful detainer can have many negative impacts, including leading to eviction, and prevent the tenant from securing housing in the future. Mid-Shore Pro Bono works with the clerks and members of the judiciary

For these reasons, Mid-Shore Pro Bono urges the Committee's support for SB564. If you have any questions regarding our position on this bill, please contact Meredith Lathbury Girard, Esq., executive director, at 410-690-8128 or mgirard@midshoreprobono.org.