

House Bill 703
**Real Property – Action to Repossess – Judgement for Tenants and Proof of Rental
Licensure**

House Judiciary Committee
February 16, 2022

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 703, which requires landlords to demonstrate to the court in eviction proceedings that they are licensed in compliance with the applicable local rental licensing requirements.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we see the traumatic impact of eviction and housing displacement every day. Homelessness and housing instability are public health crises, and the failure of Maryland's safety net systems to assist struggling low-income renters has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. COVID-19 has laid to bare longstanding inequities in our systems, including inequitable eviction processes. We strongly support HB 703, and the examples below outline how we see this legislation benefiting those we serve:

HB 703 will reduce the incidence and burdens of homelessness. We provide homeless services across central and western Maryland, and often those we work with tell us their households spiraled into homelessness due to an eviction they faced alone and without mediation or support. The stories we hear from our clients mirror what Census shows: as of January 2022, just under 150,000 Maryland households are at risk of eviction.¹ Stable housing is a cornerstone of stable families, and this bill strengthens the fairness of the eviction process by requiring landlords to demonstrate they are compliant with local rental licensing laws in any residential eviction case.

Reenvisioning eviction proceedings in Maryland will assist in the social and economic recovery from COVID. Without stable shelter, families are more susceptible to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), hunger, behavioral health crises, and poor health - including increased risk of contracting COVID. These past two years in our head start programs our caseworkers have talked to hundreds of parents that have told us they are at risk of eviction and looking for assistance. The pandemic has demonstrated the gaping holes in our safety net programs, especially for people of color. Evictions and homelessness have a disparate impact on black and brown communities. Requiring landlords to be properly licensed promotes safe housing, protects families, and ultimately is a step in the effort to dismantle the inequities born of structural racism and oppression in our legal and social safety net systems.

Changing our eviction process is sound fiscal policy. Evictions further entrench families into homelessness, poverty, and adverse childhood experiences, which are extraordinarily expensive to address. Maryland should be working to prevent loss of housing, especially among households with children. Safe and reliable housing provides the stability needed to secure and maintain employment, promote good health, invest in educational opportunities and ultimately saves the state resources that otherwise go to maintain shelters and state-funded safety net programs. We know our individuals and families thrive in economically secure households with stable housing, and thriving families means a thriving economy.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 703.

Submitted By: Lisa Klingenmaier, Assistant Director of Advocacy

¹ US Census. 2022. Census Household Pulse Survey Data. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp41.html>