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TO: The Honorable Luke Clippinger  
Chair, Judiciary Committee

FROM: Hannibal G. Williams II Kemerer  
Chief Counsel, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: SB 662 – Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Funding – **Support**

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Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee, I write to urge you to favorably report Senate Bill 662. The Office of the Attorney General supports SB 662, sponsored by Senator Craig J. Zucker, *et al.* Senate Bill 662 would appropriate the necessary initial funding for the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund (the “Fund”). Providing the Fund with an initial appropriation of \$11.8 million is essential to fulfilling the aims and goals of the General Assembly in enacting HB 18 in 2021.

Absent funding, renters will continue to overwhelmingly face eviction actions without counsel. As of January 2022, 62% of Maryland renters believe they are somewhat or very likely to be evicted within the next two months.<sup>1</sup> Eviction, or a mere threat of eviction, is “associated with numerous mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, exposure to violence, mental health hospitalization, and suicide.”<sup>2</sup> Eviction is particularly “traumatizing to children and affects emotional and physical well-being and development for years, if not for lifetimes.”<sup>3</sup> Without adequate funding for access to counsel, Maryland renters will continue to experience the detrimental emotional and physical effects the General Assembly sought to avoid last session by enacting House Bill 18. Accordingly, the Office of the Attorney General requests that the Judiciary Committee give Senate Bill 662 a favorable report.

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<sup>1</sup> January 2022, US Census Household Pulse Survey Week 42 Housing Tab 3b, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp41.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Emily A. Benefer et al., *Eviction, Health Inequity, and the Spread of COVID-19: Housing Policy as a Primary Pandemic Mitigation Strategy*, J. URB. HEALTH 1, 4 (last revised Dec. 7, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

cc: The Honorable Craig J. Zucker and Committee Members