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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

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TESTIMONY ON SB564 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Prevention Services

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Molly Amster, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Molly Amster. I live in District 43, and I am the Maryland Policy Director & Baltimore Director of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). I am submitting this testimony in support of SB564, Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Prevention Services, on behalf of JUFJ. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across Maryland in support of state and local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns, inspired by our Jewish values.

Jewish texts are full of conversation, laws and traditions about the obligations of landlords and tenants, about building homes safely and about making sure people can remain housed. For example, the Talmud teaches that a landlord cannot evict a tenant during the rainy season - surely a pandemic would be a similarly important time to protect against homelessness. The Gemara in Bava Kamma teaches that, in response to a plague, we have an obligation to stay in our homes as much as possible. It is unjust and cruel, and contrary to Jewish values, to rush toward eviction where there is a less drastic alternative which could avoid eviction altogether. Passing SB564 will provide these alternatives to eviction.

In 2021, there were over 355,000 eviction actions filed in Maryland - and that was amid pandemic-caused scheduling delays, a federal moratorium on evictions, and the unprecedented availability of emergency rent relief. **As Maryland slowly opens up again these numbers will rise, unless we pass SB564.**

SB564 would make effective use of existing eviction prevention services when they are needed most: at court, on the day of trial of an eviction case. This bill would provide consistency in allowing reasonable time for a renter facing eviction to become better prepared for trial or to find services aimed at avoiding trial and eviction altogether.

We urge the Committee to vote favorable on SB564 without weakening amendments.