



MLSC

MARYLAND LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

IOLTA - INTEREST ON LAWYER TRUST ACCOUNTS

Testimony Concerning HB 824
“Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Data - Collection and Distribution”
Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee
Hearing Date: February 16, 2022

Position: Favorable

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Maryland Legal Services Corporation requests a favorable report on House Bill 824, enactment of which would require collection and publication of certain eviction data.

MLSC is a legislatively created nonprofit organization with a mission to ensure low-income Marylanders have access to stable, efficient and effective civil legal assistance through the distribution of funds to nonprofit legal services organizations. The Maryland General Assembly recognized the importance of civil legal services in rent court by passing the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program during the 2021 session. When funded, the Program will provide legal representation as well as related tenant outreach and education, ensuring low-income tenants facing loss of housing know their rights and have an advocate to guide them through the court process.

As the administrator of the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program, MLSC looks forward to building on our previous eviction prevention grants to ensure the Program proceeds effectively and efficiently, once funding is provided. To that end, accurate and timely data on the current eviction landscape will be crucial, especially during the Program’s implementation period. Both MLSC and the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force will perform ongoing evaluations of the Program, and this data will provide a baseline from which we can measure outcomes by type of eviction action.

The data will also be key to the tenant outreach and education portion of the Program. With zip code and Census tract-level data, community groups can target activities to highly impacted neighborhoods, ensuring tenants in these areas receive information about the Program and their rights. This outreach will be key in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Program, as the earlier tenants can get connected to counsel in the lifecycle of their case, the better. For tenants who may have an existing wariness of the justice system, using community groups as trusted messengers could help engage more tenants in their cases. Data will also be valuable to MLSC in selecting the community groups with which to contract for outreach services, as we will be able to ask potential contractors of their experience working in particular neighborhoods.

MLSC recognizes that the Judiciary and Department of Housing and Community Development may need additional resources to fulfill the directives of this legislation and would encourage the General Assembly to consider such needs throughout the budget and legislative processes.

MLSC asks for favorable consideration of House Bill 824.