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Baltimore City

Health and Government Operations
Committee

Chair

Government Operations and
Health Facilities Subcommittee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review



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Testimony of Delegate Samuel Rosenberg

Before the House Judiciary Committee

In support of

House Bill 712

**Landlord and Tenant – Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund –
Mandatory Appropriation**

Mister Chairman and Members of the Committee:

During last year's session, this committee was crucial to the enactment of House Bill 18, establishing access to counsel for tenants in landlord/tenant administrative and judicial proceedings. The passage of that bill signified the assembly's acknowledgement of the importance of counsel for tenants facing eviction and other court filings.

House Bill 712 would require the Governor to appropriate the maximum available federal rent assistance to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Fund (ACE). This bill would ensure that the ACE is supported with federal appropriations. It is one piece of a comprehensive funding plan that also includes House Bill 571, Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Alteration.

Access to counsel in eviction cases is both effective and financially sound. Evictions, and their consequences, result in a net financial drain on state resources and the legal system. There are potential cost savings related to Medicaid, incarceration, foster care for children, and administrative costs if the number of evictions decreases.

In Baltimore City alone, for every dollar spent on legal representation for tenants, the social safety net expense would decrease by at least \$3.06.¹ Building a requisite allotment into

¹ Steinkamp, N. (2020). The Economic Impact of an Eviction Right to Counsel in Baltimore City. Page 8. Stout Risius Ross, LLC. <https://www.stout.com/-/media/pdf/baltimore-rtc-report.pdf>

the annual budget for access to counsel in evictions is, therefore, not only morally imperative, it is fiscally smart.

Using state funds on a program that helps our most vulnerable citizens and has a 300% rate of return is a good investment in itself. Mandating the maximum allocation of Federal Rental Assistance Money that is available for ACE will result in the policy benefits of access to counsel.

HB 712, along with HB 571, is a critical step in ensuring that the Access to Counsel in Evictions Fund is adequately funded. If we fail to do so, the effectiveness of providing counsel in cases of eviction is muted, and the original purpose of House Bill 18 will not be realized.

I urge a favorable report on House Bill 712.

February 16, 2022