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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 712 – Landlord and Tenant - Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Mandatory Appropriation

Judiciary Committee
February 16, 2022

SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 712 (HB712) bill would require the Governor to appropriate any remaining federal rental assistance money that has been allocated to the state, to fund tenant access to counsel.

Written Comments: The pandemic has dramatically exacerbated an already budding affordable housing crisis in Maryland. The eventual amount of evictions it leads to could be unprecedented. SB 521 would help mitigate the effects of this crisis by funding the *already existing* tenant access to counsel program. It will ensure that all tenants have access to what should be considered a basic resource, during an eviction.

Just 1% of tenants appear in rent court with representation, compared to 98% of landlords who do have representation. This undoubtedly leaves tenants lost in the proceedings of rent court and makes it significantly more likely they will conclude with a negative disposition. Not only would this bill keep more tenants in their homes, it would save the state and localities millions of dollars each year in services for would-be homeless families, while decreasing the burden on law enforcement and the courts.

As the legislative arm of The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, we represent Comprehensive Housing Assistance Inc. (CHAI). CHAI works to provide assistance to all residents of Northwest Baltimore. This includes helping them find a safe place to live, and to stay in their home even during difficult circumstances. This bill would provide CHAI, and all housing assistance agencies in Maryland with more of the tools they need to continue helping clients in need. With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of HB 712.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.