

Hearing: Feb. 16, 2022 if  
Claire Landers  
Baltimore, MD 21209

**TESTIMONY ON HB0724/SB0662 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Access to Counsel Evictions Special Fund - Funding**

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

**FROM:** Claire Landers

My name is Claire Landers. I am a resident of Baltimore County, a constituent of District 11 and submit this testimony in support of HB0724, Access to Counsel Special Fund.

I strongly support HB0724 after my experience as a volunteer observer in Baltimore City Rent Court as part of The Abell Foundation study conducted by the Public Justice Center (PJC) and Right to Housing Alliance. Observing dozens of cases churn through Rent Court was truly eye-opening: Rent Court appeared to operate with less due process and judicial mercy toward tenants than proceedings I have seen in Traffic Court, where drivers are allowed every opportunity to contest even serious violations, many drivers appear with attorneys at their side and most receive reductions in violations and consequences.

I believe Rent Court does not function in the way we expect American courtrooms to operate for one reason: the vast majority of tenants do not have lawyers. Nearly every renter I observed was “on their own” without possessing the legal background to advocate effectively for themselves nor basic knowledge of their rights as a renter. I saw tenants often *attempted* to make their case to their judge regarding non-payment of rent - with photos and paperwork as evidence of disputes over disrepair, mold, rodent infestation or other problems. Yet judges regularly would inform tenants that “today’s proceeding is not about evidence or disputes,” but focused on “whether or not they had paid their rent and should be subject to eviction”.

I venture to say that no one on this esteemed committee would ever have themselves - or the people they care about - appear without counsel in a legal proceeding that holds dire consequences: In the case of Rent Court, that means losing the roof over your head. It is incumbent upon us to provide the resources to ensure that Maryland's rent court procedures are fairer and more equitable to all parties. I respectfully urge members of the Judiciary Committee to support HB724 with a favorable report.