

February 16, 2022

Michael English
Silver Spring, MD, 20910

TESTIMONY ON HB0724 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund - Funding

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

FROM: Michael English

My name is Michael English, and I live in downtown Silver Spring, part of Maryland District 20. I am writing this testimony in support of HB0724, Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund-Funding. As happy as I was to see Access to Counsel pass last year, it wasn't supposed to be "access" to counsel, it was supposed to be *right* to counsel. I can still remember watching with my fellow JUFJers on Sine Die as the hours, then minutes, then seconds ticked away, and it became clear that the vital funding needed to make the bill work was going to be defeated not by an up or down vote, but by shameless talking to death of it and countless other bills by comfortably housed legislators running out the clock to midnight. It was shameful, it represents everything wrong with our legislative system as we know it, and it absolutely cannot happen again when the stakes are so high for so many. I spend a lot of time pushing for more housing, and more affordable housing, and all of that matters, but it matters a lot less if the people who need it most have to face eviction from these homes alone, facing a byzantine, and terrifying process.

Currently, only 1% of tenants who find themselves in Rent Court are represented by a lawyer, while 96% of landlords have representation. That simply isn't right, and I'm frankly sick and tired of hearing excuses as to why this can continue. It is immoral on its very face. On what is the scariest, most life changing day in most people's lives, the least we can do is make sure they don't have to go through potentially being made homeless without legal aid. It's true establishing a program to help renters access legal counsel would reduce evictions, and would also save the state tens of millions of dollars in reduced Medicaid and foster care costs related to homelessness, with similar savings in local jurisdictions, and that isn't to be dismissed, but frankly I shouldn't need to tell you all that in order to convince you to do something this basic, this simple, and this unambiguously right. Do the right thing.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0724.

