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Written Testimony

**Senate Bill 756 - Access to Counsel in Evictions – Funding
 Senate Budget and Taxation Committee – March 1, 2023**

Support

Background: Senate Bill 756 would require that the Comptroller distributes \$14,000,000 of certain abandoned property funds to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund, and the Governor includes in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$14,000,000 from the Fund to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, permanently.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. This includes Jewish Community Services (JCS), which provides social services to low-income Marylanders.

Maryland has one of the highest rates of poverty in the country, with almost 50% of those living in poverty being considered as living in *deep* poverty. Evictions further entrench families into these adverse experiences, which can be expensive to address. Maryland should be working to prevent loss of housing as frequently as possible. Safe and reliable housing provides the stability needed to secure and maintain employment; promote good health; and invest in educational opportunities.

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 significantly more likely to face a negative outcome. Not only would this bill keep more tenants in their homes, it would save the state and local jurisdictions millions of dollars each year in services for would-be homeless families while reducing the workload for the court systems.

By mandating the appropriation of \$14M annually to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund, Maryland will ensure that low-income tenants facing eviction across the state have the right to an attorney to enforce existing legal protections.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for a favorable report on SB756.

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.