



**Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony in Support of SB756
Access to Counsel in Evictions – Funding
March 1, 2023
SUPPORT**

TO: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair; The Honorable Jim Rosapepe, Vice Chair; and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County’s local, state, and federally designated anti-poverty group, is in full support of SB756 and asks the Committee for a favorable report. The Board supported the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund last year and was pleased to see the bill pass. As evictions remain an ongoing problem and access to legal services is limited across the state and country, the Board recognizes the reality that this Special Fund will be necessary for years to come. We support SB756 for requiring the Comptroller to annually distribute \$14,000,000 from the sale of abandoned property to the Access to Council in Evictions Special Fund and requiring the Governor to include in the state budget an allocation of \$14,000,000 from the Fund to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation.

With the protections for renters against evictions that were in place during the pandemic ending, along with many emergency rental assistance programs, added support for renters is even more critical now. The effects of the pandemic on lower-income residents were only exacerbated by the already limited supply of affordable housing in Montgomery County and in many other parts of the state. It is telling that nearly half of all renters in the County are cost-burdened, meaning that they spend 30% or more of income on housing alone.¹ This is part of a larger picture where the cost of living has skyrocketed and wages have not kept up, making affording basic necessities even more difficult for lower-income members of our community. The Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard for a household with two working adults, one preschooler, and one school-age child is now \$122,943, over four times the federal poverty level.² Added supports for families struggling to meet the Self-Sufficiency Standard are desperately needed, including legal assistance funded by SB756 if a household finds itself in the unfortunate circumstances of facing eviction.

We ask the Committee members to support this bill and to continue to explore policies that will help Marylanders find and maintain affordable housing.

¹ <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/MoCo-HNA-July-2020.pdf>

² <https://maryland-cap.org/the-maryland-2023-self-sufficiency-standard-calculator/>