

**TESTIMONY OF CATHERINA VANDENBURG
STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF LAW**

IN SUPPORT OF SB 756

**BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE
MARYLAND SENATE
March 1, 2023**

My name is Catherina Vandenburg, and I am a second-year law student at The University of Baltimore in the Evening Program. I write to express my support of Senate Bill 756, to establish a permanent funding mechanism for the Maryland Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund.

I am a part-time evening student working my way through law school. Last semester, I had the opportunity to complete an internship with the Pro Bono Resource Center in their Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day (TVLD) program. I was able to do so only through the financial support given to me by the Law School through the new Housing Justice Fellowship Program, which is funded by an Access to Counsel in Evictions grant.

Without the Fellowship stipend, I would not have been able to reduce my work hours at my primary place of employment and still make ends meet. The Fellowship allowed me to free up time for my internship with PBRC. The choice between completing an internship that serves the community or being able to afford rent is a reality many law students face. The Housing Justice Fellowship program enabled me to explore an area of law that I care deeply about by creating the opportunity and making it a financially viable option.

I am the first person in my family to attend law school. Since I was a child, I have seen firsthand how not being able to afford legal counsel affects people. Being served with a court summons is terrifying, especially for those who do not have the social or economic resources to navigate the legal world. The fear of losing one's home causes tremendous anxiety. People who do not have attorneys have to take time off of work to prepare for and attend court, which puts their livelihood at even further risk. Seeing these injustices is one of the reasons I decided to attend law school.

Lack of access to counsel disproportionately impacts low-income individuals, women, and minorities. According to Eviction Lab, there are 361 evictions filed per day in Baltimore City, of which 61.9% are black renters. Many of these are single mothers. Moreover, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define unstable housing and economic stress as risk factors for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). We know that ACEs have a long-term impact on the physical, mental and emotional health of individuals as they become adults.

Through my internship at PBRC, I had the chance to provide people at risk of eviction with a listening ear and a chance to have their voices heard. This was a tremendous learning opportunity for me. It helped me better understand legal issues I care about, and build skills that will help me become a better lawyer. I know that many more law students would benefit from paid opportunities to work on housing rights work across Maryland. I urge that Access to Counsel in Eviction funding be made permanent so that other students can gain exposure to this important work.