



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Delegate Dana Stein, Vice Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: March 13, 2023
RE: HB0691 Tenant Safety Act

The MLLC supports HB0691 Tenant Safety Act

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0691.

Latinx are twice as likely to be renters than whites,¹ and according to the National Equity Atlas, in Maryland renters of color are disproportionately housing insecure, with Latinx households representing 37%; and those behind on rent are overwhelmingly people of color, representing 80%.² Many renters, particularly low-income tenants, who are predominantly people of color, are avoidant of bringing an escrow action individually because they fear targeting and retaliation by their landlords, or feel intimidated by the prospect of going alone to face their landlords in a judicial process they know little about. Consequently, rent escrow is perennially underutilized by renters across the state.³

HB0691 addresses the shortcomings of the rent escrow law (Real Property § 8-211), which permits a single tenant to pay rent into a court account and to seek an array of forms of relief. By providing groups of tenants with the opportunity to file together, tenants will be able to exert significantly more pressure on landlords to make repairs in the first place. Permitting tenants to pursue damages against a landlord that fails to make repairs, landlords will be required to account for the actual harm caused by their refusals to make necessary repairs – a remedy that is much more persuasive than lost rental income alone. Minimizing the time-consuming and intimidating nature of filing a lawsuit. This will ensure that Marylanders who rent properties can live in a safe and habitable home, without the fear of retaliation from their landlord if they pursue rent escrow, and with a much greater likelihood of the repairs being solved.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB0691.

¹ Cilluffo, A., Geiger, A. w. & Fry, R. (n.d.). More U.S. households are renting than at any point in 50 years. *Pew Research Center*.

² *Rent Debt Dashboard*. (n.d.). National Equity Atlas.

³ Donovan, D., & Marbella, J. (2017, April 26). *Dismissed: Tenants lose, landlords win in Baltimore's rent court*. The Baltimore Sun.