



## CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

**HB 684  
Support**

**House Environment and Transportation Committee  
February 24, 2023**

**HB 684: Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions**

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The City of Takoma Park supports and urges favorable consideration of HB 684.

This bill promotes stable housing by expressly granting authority to local legislatures to decide when it is appropriate for rental agreements to be non-renewed. That means local policymakers would be able to determine the kind of “just cause” policy their locality needs, whether by type of building, for certain populations, or under certain circumstances such as a state of emergency. Without HB 684, local efforts are stymied by legal concerns around preemption.

The bill articulates many circumstances that would qualify as reasonable cause for rental agreements to be non-renewed. The City agrees with these circumstances. At the same time, the bill provides protections for renters against potential unfair treatment, discrimination, or surprises that could have far-reaching adverse impacts on individuals and families.

The need for HB 684 was evident during the pandemic. During the height of the pandemic, various state and federal orders provided limited protections against evictions. However, most of these protections have expired.

It is important to note that during the moratorium, tenants were only protected in “failure to pay rent” cases. Landlords and property owners were never prohibited from filing “tenant holding over” cases, which is what a local “just cause” law could address. These cases can be brought when a landlord does not want to renew a lease. This can happen when there are legitimate reasons – like the causes listed in the proposed legislation such as substantial breach of lease, illegal activity on the part of the tenant, or if the property is being taken out of the rental market.

Under current law, however, a landlord does not need a just cause, or any cause at all. This means that through no fault of their own, families can be evicted when a lease expires.

This loophole makes it too easy for families to be forced out of their homes with little or no ability to defend themselves. Tenants can be taken to court and displaced with virtually no reason provided. They are often without legal representation and have little chance of success against skilled attorneys.

Growing up, my mother struggled to provide a roof over our heads. I've experienced first-hand the impact of housing instability on student achievement, employment, and the emotional well-being of an entire family. City staff – and I personally – have witnessed the devastation of involuntary displacement on our residents. A lifetime of belongings quickly packed up or left on the street. Seniors and young families scrambling to find a place to stay. Children moved from one school to another. This negatively impacts not just these individuals and families but our whole community.

HB 684 clearly outlines the process and justifiable reasons for evictions, and still permits landlords to continue to be able to evict a tenant who breaches their lease, engages in criminal activity, endangers other tenants, or does not pay their rent. As public servants, we all want to ensure that if anyone is being removed from their home, it is for good reason. We have an opportunity to make that happen.

For these reasons, Takoma Park urges a favorable report on HB 684 so that local governments can act with clear authority on this issue. We sincerely thank Delegate Wilkins for her leadership on this issue.