



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 684

Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause
Termination Provisions

House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 24, 2023

Dear Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee,

CASA is pleased to offer favorable testimony in strong support of HB 684, Local Just Cause Termination Provisions- key legislation that ensures tenants do not face unfair, unjust, discriminatory or arbitrary evictions by enabling local jurisdiction to create “Just Cause policies” regarding evictions. CASA is the largest immigrant services and advocacy organization in Maryland, and in the Mid-Atlantic region, with a membership of over 120,000 Black and Latino immigrants and working families. Our mission is to create a more just society by building power and improving the quality of life in working-class and immigrant communities. We envision a future where our members stand in their own power, our families live free from discrimination and fear, and our diverse communities thrive as we work with our partners to achieve full human rights for all.

For nearly forty years, CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our communities closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing much-needed services to these communities, helping to ensure that low-income immigrants are able to live rich and full lives. An example of our powerful grassroots efforts are CASA member-led tenant associations and groups that are increasing in number and effectiveness. Our grassroots organizing has created safer housing for our members in Maryland, especially Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties.

However, we have seen numerous families face eviction for arbitrary or retaliatory reasons. Although our members strongly organize and demand safe housing conditions many fear that their landlords will evict them for the sole fact that they are unwavering in their calls for better housing conditions. These types of retaliatory evictions are not uncommon.

What is “just cause” policy?

When it comes to lease non-renewals, Maryland is currently a "no cause" state – that is, a landlord can decide to non-renew without any stated cause. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They

are under constant pressure to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities.

HB 684 enables Maryland counties to pass local "just cause" laws that limit lease non-renewals. "Just cause" means that a landlord must have an acceptable reason for choosing not to renew an expiring lease. HB 684 defines what "just cause" is, but does not impose specific contours for just cause to permit counties to decide. Instead, the HB 684 provides a list of options for what "just cause," as adopted by a county, may include, such as substantial lease violations, illegal activities, removal of the property from the market, or personal use of the property by the owner. HB0684's list reflects the policies of other U.S. jurisdictions that have enacted just cause policy. *To be clear, this is a list that localities are free to adopt or change, as localities see fit.*

Where is the interest in "just cause eviction"?

Since 2008, just cause eviction legislation has been introduced in 8 times – including multiple statewide bills, as well as bills specific to Prince George's County and Montgomery County. During the COVID-19 state of emergency, Howard County unsuccessfully attempted to prohibit lease non-renewals while Baltimore City passed a short-term provision to require just cause for lease non-renewals until 6 months after the state of emergency's end. These efforts demonstrate a sustained desire in Maryland localities for just cause policies.

Washington, D.C. (since 1985) and Philadelphia (since 2018) have adopted just cause eviction policies, and the state of New Jersey, too (since 1974). New Jersey's policy endeavor over many decades demonstrates that the benefit of just cause far outweighs the hypothetical that it hurts development. ["Something in the Garden State is clearly working. According to data from the Eviction Lab, New Jersey cities such as Trenton, Paterson, Jersey City, and West New York have among the lowest eviction rates in the country. Meanwhile, construction is absolutely exploding."](#)

Additionally, looking at 4 localities in California, a [2019 Princeton/Eviction Lab](#) study finds that "just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates. Given the budget limitations of many states and municipalities to fund other solutions to the eviction crisis, passage of just cause eviction ordinances appears to be a relatively low-cost, effective policy solution."

HB 684 recognizes that local legislatures want to aid their renters in achieving stable housing so that they are able contribute long-term to the workforce and the local economy. Requiring just cause as a precondition for an eviction can be a tailored policy that boosts the stability of the housing market by stabilizing families, neighborhoods, and communities. HB 684 ensures local legislatures can pass enforceable laws whereby no one is arbitrarily deprived of their housing.

CASA is a member of the Renters United Maryland coalition, a statewide coalition of renters, organizers, and advocates, and **we urge the Committee's report of Favorable on HB0684.**