

Agnes Kwenthieu - Fairland Crossing Apartments, Silver Spring MD 20904

Good afternoon, my name is Agnes Kwenthieu, and I am writing today to share my story about the need for just cause evictions. I have lived in Fairland Crossing, a set of apartments with over 600 units in Montgomery County, for more than seven years. During that time, I have faced poor maintenance and unresponsive management to emergencies that nearly resulted in retaliatory eviction.

Fairland Crossing is falling apart, and basic appliances like my refrigerator and cooker were in disrepair for more than a year. I frequently experience leaks and other issues that are not addressed promptly. In August 2021, my stove caught on fire. It was unrelated to my cooking. Thankfully, my family was able to put out the fire. But because of the fire, my family and I were unable to use our stove to cook our meals, and we did not have enough income to eat out. I tried to contact the management at Fairland Crossing and even called their emergency line several times, but I did not receive an answer. I emailed them, too, but again no response.

A week later on August 17th, 2021, I emailed the Department of Housing and Community Affairs of Montgomery County for help because my stove was still unusable and my family was going hungry. On August 19th, 2021, Rosie McCray-Moodie of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs called Fairland Crossing management to address the issue. However, just one day later, on August 20th, 2021, I received a nonrenewal of lease notice from Sage Ventures, the landlord, for no reason. This notice stated that my family must vacate the property by December 15th, 2021, or be charged two times the monthly rental rate.

I was confused and devastated by the notice because I had always paid my rent on time and had not received any complaints from management. I felt that this was retaliation for reaching out to the county for help with the fire incident. I felt helpless and unsure of what to do until I found a pro-bono lawyer who advised me continuously on how to write emails to management about the retaliatory nature of their actions. After a couple months of continuous pressure, Sage Ventures revoked their lease non-renewal notice.

This experience has made me realize the importance of just cause evictions. Tenants should not be at risk of losing their homes simply for reporting issues or seeking help. I have many neighbors in my exact situation- paying their part, while management neglects their contract to maintain their homes. But we have no choice but to keep our voices silenced, because if we were to be kicked out we would have nowhere else we can afford to live. I believe that we need stronger protections for tenants in Maryland, including the right to just cause evictions. These protections would ensure that tenants like myself are not subject to retaliation from landlords for simply exercising our freedom of speech.

Thank you for considering just cause for evictions and your constituents like me.