



Testimony HB 303
House Environment and Transportation Committee
March 10, 2023
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities.

HB 303 would require landlords of residential rental units in Baltimore City to provide air conditioning between June 1 and September 31 of each year at a certain level for properties with residents 3 years of age or younger or 65 years of age or older.

In order to protect older adults and young children from the dangerous and deadly effects of extreme heat and resolve a dangerous inconsistency in state law, this bill is essential and will serve to protect life, health, and safety of vulnerable residents.

The bill requires climate control capable of cooling a unit to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. It does not require substantial renovations for central air conditioning in every unit – window units or ductless systems provide less expensive alternatives to ensure safe temperatures. Thus, the cost burden faced by property owners can be limited. Despite rent escrow's availability for lack of heat in the winter, air conditioning is not considered essential to life, health, and safety under Maryland's escrow law. Instead, lack of air conditioning is listed alongside cosmetic issues, with a presumption that it does not pose a serious threat to renters..

Heat waves pose serious risks for those who lack access to air conditioning, including many lower-income renters. Without reliable indoor cooling, hot and humid temperatures can quickly overwhelm the body's capacity to sweat and shed excess heat, leading to heat stress and other illness, or even death. Keeping people safe during heat waves will require ensuring that all residents, including renters, have access to affordable indoor cooling.

Last summer's catastrophic "heat dome" in the Pacific Northwest, which claimed the lives of hundreds, drove home the critical importance of access to home cooling systems. Black communities are particularly at risk from heat-related illness and death. Researchers have attributed higher levels of heat-related illness and death among Black individuals, in part, to a lack of access to air conditioning. In keeping with this finding, analysis in *Epidemiology Journal* by the New York City Department of Health identified a lack of access to air conditioning as a key contributor to heat vulnerability in Black neighborhoods.

We ask for your favorable report on HB 303.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network