

Testimony to the House Environment & Transportation Committee
HB 684 – Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Just
Cause Termination Provisions
Position: Favorable
Economic Action Maryland

February 24, 2023

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
House Environment & Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment & Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michael Donnelly from Economic Action Maryland. We are a nonprofit organization that works to advance economic justice and equity statewide through direct service, research, education, and advocacy.

We write today in support of House Bill 684.

Our Tenant Advocacy program provides assistance to renters and property owners in every Maryland county. We provide information on rights and responsibilities and make referrals to other organizations when necessary. Based on what we hear from renters, lease non-renewal has become a severe problem in Maryland. With rents at all-time highs across the country, property owners are choosing not to renew leases for existing residents.¹

The human cost of non-renewals is immense. Without anywhere affordable to move to, residents are forced to settle for inadequate or dangerous housing so they can at least have a roof over their heads. The problem has become particularly severe for renters with month-to-month tenancies. With the short-term nature of their leases, they are at risk of losing their homes or facing unaffordable rent-increases if they sign new leases. This can lead to displacement or dramatic rent increases that make it unaffordable to keep living in a home.

House Bill 684 provides one solution to this crisis by enabling local governments to pass just-cause termination laws to protect renters. If enacted, local governments would be enabled to better protect renters from the displacement and expenses that run from unexplained lease non-renewals. This doesn't trap property owners in indefinite lease agreements. The bills lists circumstances that qualify as just cause for non-renewal. It also does not create new requirements on its own. It would enable jurisdictions to create protections for renters in a way that reflects the needs of their communities.

With an affordable housing crisis upon us, House Bill 684 provides one means of easing the burden on renters. It is measured legislation that could protect families from precarity and displacement.

¹ <https://cre.moodyanalytics.com/insights/market-insights/q4-2022-housing-affordability-update/>

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 691.

Respectfully,
Michael Donnelly
Economic Action Maryland