



Testimony in support of HB 691

**Landlord and Tenant - Failure to Repair Serious and Dangerous Defects - Tenant Remedies
(Tenant Safety Act)**

Before the Environment and Transportation Committee on February 24th, 2023

Position: FAVORABLE

To Chair Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name Ricarra Jones and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation, representing over 10,000 members in Maryland & Washington DC alone. Our union supports HB 691 to ensure every Marylander lives in safe and healthy units. We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report.

Our members work in hospitals, federally qualified health centers, and long-term care facilities across the state. They are certified nursing assistants, dietary aides, housekeepers, janitors, and technicians taking care of our most vulnerable patients. However, when they go home, they have to deal with uncompliant landlords that fail to repair serious and dangerous defects. One 1199 SEIU member struggled to navigate the justice system when her landlord failed to remedy water damage and mold in her home.

1199 SEIU supports HB 691 because it allows tenants to band together around shared concerns to compel their landlords to make life-saving repairs. As a union, our healthcare workers understand the power of collective advocacy amidst a severe healthcare staffing crisis to support the health and wellbeing of their patients and co-workers. The ability to have safe and livable homes is a public health issue that impacts the health of residents across the state.

1199 SEIU members have been referred to our legal partners that support tenants facing housing injustice, eviction, or seeking rent escrow. HB 691 strengthens the attorney's fees provisions which increases the likelihood that tenants will seek legal recourse for harms caused by landlord negligence. Tenants face an unfair power imbalance when confronting landlords with rent escrow and risk retaliation that impacts housing stability. This bill reduces the likelihood of landlord intimidation. Increasing access to justice for members who are care takers, disabled, or elderly is a worthy cause in a system that often disadvantages our most vulnerable residents.

For these reasons and more, 1199 SEIU urges the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 691.

In unity,

Ricarra Jones, Political Director of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East

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