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HB0303 - Baltimore City - Air Conditioning in Residential Rental Units

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Position: FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that stands with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing and their rights to fair and equal treatment by Maryland's landlord-tenant laws, courts, and agencies. We advocate to change laws regarding evictions and to demand the development of equitable and sustainable affordable housing. **PJC believes that House Bill 303 is a necessary step to ensuring Maryland renters have a safe home.** Currently in Maryland, air conditioning is not considered essential to life, health, and safety under Maryland's escrow law and is not a required feature landlords must offer tenants. This is dangerous and puts thousands of renters, particularly older adults, tenants with disabilities and children, unnecessarily at risk.^{1 2 3}

In a city like Baltimore, where there is minimal tree cover and green spaces, higher temperatures create a deadly situation for those who do not have air conditioning. Because there is no requirement to provide air conditioning, approximately 51% of Baltimore households tenants have no guarantee that their homes will protect them from hazardous summer heat. We have relegated many tenants throughout the city and the state open and exposed to heat-related illnesses and complications.

PJC supports House Bill 303 as it would protect some of the most vulnerable renters (older adults and children) from extreme heat. There is precedent for House Bill 303. Montgomery County already requires air conditioning in rental housing units if the building is not a single-family dwelling or on the National Register of Historic Places.⁴ In following Montgomery County legislation, House Bill 303 requires a home to have climate-controlled units capable of cooling a unit to 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

PJC believes that House Bill 303 is a crucial step to ensure that our most vulnerable tenants are safe.

¹ <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/the-dangers-of-extreme-heat/>

² https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/pubs/extreme-heat-final_508.pdf

³ <https://www.weather.gov/ffc/heat2>

⁴ <https://www3.montgomerycountymd.gov/311/Solutions.aspx?SolutionId=1-6VX9W2>

Public Justice Center is a member of the Renters United Maryland coalition and asks that the Committee **issue a FAVORABLE report on HB303**. If you have any questions, please contact Albert Turner, Esq., turnera@publicjustice.org (410) 625-9409 Ext. 250.

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