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Dr. Jeffrey S. Rubin
Potomac, MD 20854



TESTIMONY ON HB684 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Landlord and Tenant - Residential Lease and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

TO: Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Dr. Jeffrey S. Rubin, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Jeffrey Rubin and I am a resident of District 15, in Potomac. **On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in support of HB684, Landlord and Tenant - Residential Lease and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions.** JUFJ organizes more than 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

Our support for this bill is rooted in Jewish values that recognize the fundamental importance of the home for a person's well-being, as well as the basic obligations of landlords to tenants. Jewish teachings affirm that one's home is the foundation upon which everything else of value in a person's life will rest. It is the place where one shelters from bad weather and stores most of their possessions. It is the place where a person has the privacy to cultivate a life of one's choosing, and has the opportunity to raise a family. The Babylonian Talmud, a sacred text dating back over 1500 years, contains specific guidelines concerning the eviction of tenants (Bava Metzia, 101b). An enduring message is that renters' needs must be taken into account.

The home is a focal point for a web of social interactions that includes friends, neighbors, schools, and other civic institutions. And so individuals, their families, and entire communities fall apart as a consequence of eviction. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, sociologist Matthew Desmond paints a vivid picture of this harm: a toxic blend of property loss, job loss, emotional turmoil, psychological instability, disruption of children's education, and degradation of community spirit. For years, eviction has been a significant problem in Montgomery County, as well as other jurisdictions across our state, and it remains a serious concern as tenants face ongoing housing shortages and rising rents.

Because of its crucial role in the well-being of individuals, families, and their surrounding communities, special protections are warranted to ensure the stability of the home. HB684 is designed to allow local jurisdictions to choose to enact such protections, while respecting the needs and rights of the landlord. It outlines an array of circumstances that justify a landlord's decision not to renew the lease of a renter. These conditions could include various contractual obligations to the landlord and specific provisions that allow the landlord to renovate or make other use of the property, such as for housing of a family member. However, it does not permit the landlord to displace renters from their homes in the absence of one of these just causes. The intention is to provide security for the renters who have made that residence their home.

Some landlords will contend that they only choose not to renew leases when they have tenants who cause trouble and are no longer welcome. They claim that the cost of having an empty rental unit is a disincentive to non-renewal of leases. While that may be a disincentive in principle, unfortunately there are many instances in which landlords have an even greater incentive to send residents packing: the opportunity to rid themselves of residents who ask for repairs of unhealthy, substandard housing; or the desire to raise rents dramatically. **HB684 would make it difficult for landlords to remove tenants who deserve to remain in their homes.**

In recent years, supermajorities of both the Montgomery County Council and the Montgomery County House Delegation have voted in support of just cause legislation. However, the Maryland General Assembly has failed to respect the will of County residents as expressed by these large majorities of their representatives. HB684 provides a remedy to this impasse by enabling local jurisdictions to determine the fate of such legislation.

On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB684.