



*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 826:**  
**Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program – Establishment**

TO: Chair Kumar P. Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica, Policy Advocate

DATE: February 24, 2023

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates for better jobs, skills training, and wages for low-income workers and job seekers in Maryland. **JOTF supports House Bill 826 as a means of ensuring that low-wage workers across the state who are on the waitlist for federal housing vouchers receive state vouchers in order to support their and their families' housing needs.**

Maryland's low-wage workers are especially vulnerable to housing instability, as they are often faced with rising costs and a lack of affordable housing options. In 2018, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) released state data on housing affordability by state and county. In the Baltimore City metro area, the NLIHC data shows that a low-wage worker would need to work over 80 hours per week to afford a market-rate apartment. On the state level, affordable housing in Maryland was declared as simply "out of reach," while the data gives a startling glimpse into the reality faced by our low-wage working families and residents.

Steady employment is predicated on affordable housing stability. A 2016 Harvard study showed that stable housing has a direct impact on an individual's ability to maintain employment. This study found that the likelihood of job loss was up to 22 percent higher for individuals who did not have secure housing. Even further, lost employment disrupts the ability to maintain housing – creating a vicious cycle of poverty for Maryland's most vulnerable. At JOTF, through our experience in workforce training, we have found that our workforce program participants are primarily renters and experience housing access and insecurity issues similar to those discussed in the Harvard study.

Economic instability stemming from the pandemic continues to push tens of thousands of Maryland households to the brink of homelessness. Currently, over 108,000 households are still behind on the rent in Maryland and need assistance avoiding eviction. JOTF supports HB 826 as a means to provide housing assistance to households that are on federal voucher waitlists. JOTF understands the fragile relationship that exists between housing and employment: to be stable in your employment, you must have a consistent, reliable, and safe place to live. For these reasons, **we respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 826.**

For more information on how HB 826 supports a thriving workforce please contact Ioana Stoica, JOTF Policy Advocate at [ioana@jotf.org](mailto:ioana@jotf.org) or 240-643-0059.