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**TESTIMONY ON HB0691 POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Tenant Safety Act**

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

**FROM:** Danielle Herrmann, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Danielle Herrmann and I am a resident of District 20, in Takoma Park. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in support of HB691, the Tenant Safety Act. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

Jewish sacred texts recognize that having safe, stable housing is key to a healthy society, and we know that it is key to reducing structural inequities. As a medical clinical social worker, I have witnessed the adverse effects of substandard housing conditions, disproportionately borne by our community's most vulnerable individuals and families. The injurious impact has staggering consequences, especially for children, BIPOC, and members of low-income communities, as well as elders and those with disabilities. Poor quality housing can lead to injury and disease, which play a large role in generating health inequities. The National Association of Social Workers recognizes that adequate shelter is essential to a stable life, mental well-being, and health and safety.

As an immunocompromised senior citizen, this universal need hits close to home; safe housing is my lifeline. But I lived in dangerous conditions despite being a tenant in good standing, paying over \$25,000 in rent per year for a unit in a multi-family dwelling. All tenants were subjected to uncontrolled roaches, which, according to Pest Control, were the result of chronic basement flooding and structural leaks creating wall moisture and mold in units. During the winter we often had insufficient or no heat for days or even weeks. Some tenants used electric heaters 24/7, which put all tenants at risk of unintended injury and death.

While we all faced the same building-wide hazardous conditions, Maryland law does not allow for groups of tenants to file for collective rent escrow or a class action case. Instead, the burden of seeking legal remedy falls to individual tenants. Yet I discovered single tenant legal

cases rarely make it to court, and was warned about a significant court backlog. My fellow tenants would have willingly sought legal remedy if we could have filed as a group, but they feared landlord retaliation if they filed individually. When I contracted a cockroach-related illness, my doctor deemed my housing unsafe for my kidney health, and instructed me to move. I was lucky, I had the financial resources to relocate - something many of my neighbors were unable to do. To date the remaining tenants continue to live in substandard conditions, including the new tenant who unwittingly moved into my former unit.

The Tenant Safety Act would address these issues by empowering tenants to jointly seek legal justice for substandard living conditions when landlords have no intention to remedy the situation.

**On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB691.**