



## House Bill 691

### Landlord and Tenant – Failure to Repair Serious and Dangerous Defects – Tenant Remedies (Tenant Safety Act)

House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 24, 2023

#### Support

**Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 691**, which allows a group of tenants to access a rent escrow process to collectively hold the landlord accountable for serious conditions of disrepair that threaten the lives, health, and safety of multiple tenants of the same landlord.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors. As one of the largest human service providers in Maryland, we see the traumatic impact of inhabitable living conditions and housing displacement every day.

**HB 691 will reduce the incidence housing instability by allowing tenants to file rent escrow cases together when there are ongoing serious conditions of disrepair that threaten all of the tenants of the same landlord.** We provide homeless services across central and western Maryland, and often those we work with tell us their households spiraled into homelessness due to an eviction or a loss of stable, safe housing. Stable housing is a cornerstone of stable families, and studies show that poor quality housing is directly correlated with poor health, including injuries and mental health struggles.<sup>1</sup> Without safe shelter, families are more susceptible to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), mold, rodents, and poor health.

**HB 691 removes barriers to the legal remedies that are available to tenants to hold landlords accountable for unsafe living conditions.** Many low-income families struggle in unsafe living conditions because of the significant barriers that often exist for tenants to file rent escrow cases. For many, the prospect of bringing an individual lawsuit raises fear of retaliation and retribution. For others, the filing fee and time missed from work are infeasible on a lean budget. HB 691 addresses these obstacles by permitting tenants to file a rent escrow case together, which will allow families to collectively leverage their time and resources to demand safer living conditions.

**HB 691 is sound fiscal policy.** Unsafe housing entrenches families into poverty and poor health, which are extraordinarily expensive to address. Maryland should be working to prevent loss of housing, especially among households with children. Safe and reliable housing provides the stability needed to secure and maintain employment, promote good health, invest in educational opportunities and ultimately saves the state resources that otherwise go to maintain shelters and state-funded safety net programs. We know our individuals and families thrive in economically secure households with stable housing, and thriving families means a thriving economy.

**On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 691.**

Submitted By: Lisa Klingenmaier, Assistant Director of Advocacy

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Morales-Brown, How Can Housing Influence Health? Med. News Today (May 13, 2021), <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/housing-and-health>.  
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