

Dear Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a resident of D46, a ten-year member of the Property Tax Assessment Appeals Board in Baltimore City, and a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice – Baltimore. **I am testifying in support of the Tenant Safety Act (HB0691).**



This bill would enable a group of tenants with the same landlord facing issues in the same property to join a single rent escrow action together, much as a similar law currently does in New York City<sup>1</sup>. Under this law, tenants could make use of the rent escrow process without each having to create a separate filing, ensuring tenants who may be behind on rent are still able to demand remedies from their landlords to potentially life-threatening conditions. It would also provide for attorney's fees and damages in these group actions to allow groups of tenants to enlist the assistance of counsel in organizing a case.

At present in Maryland, a group of tenants experiencing the same substandard living conditions from the same landlord each have to file an action individually, and they frequently do not have the benefit of representation, as it can be expensive to hire counsel. **Even when tenants do file, only 6% of cases in rent court result in reduced rent, according to a Baltimore Sun review of over 5,500 cases from 2010 to 2016<sup>2</sup> – a disturbingly low rate.**

Maryland was ranked 32nd among the 50 states for severe housing problems in a recent analysis of US Housing & Urban Development data from 2015-2019<sup>3</sup>. Our state could be leading the nation at providing safe and affordable housing. But we are not.

This legislation addresses two growing concerns among Marylanders: first, their need for safer housing conditions, and second, the need to lower the barrier of entry to courts to address poor housing conditions. Remarkably, this bill addresses both concerns *while increasing court efficiency*. Since conditions issues cases can be compiled across a particular property owned by a particular landlord into a single proceeding, the courts are saved the administrative burden of duplicative cases.

It is for these reasons that I am strongly encouraging you to vote **in support of HB0691**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Liz Simon-Higgs  
308 E Randall Street  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/RPP/230>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.baltimoresun.com/news/dismissed/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/severe\\_housing\\_problems/state/MD](https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/severe_housing_problems/state/MD)