



MARYLAND
LEGAL AID

Advancing
Human Rights and
Justice for All

February 13, 2023

The Honorable William C. Smith
Chair of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Maryland Legal Aid's Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 450

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 450, which would prohibit calls to police or emergency service providers, whether by the tenant or others, from being the sole basis for landlords to evict tenants from their homes.

I submit this testimony on behalf of Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) at the request of Senator Dawn Gile. MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including representing people and families struggling with housing and eviction.

The right to housing is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and indeed is binding on this nation and state, because its precepts have acquired the status of customary international law. One of the principal tenets of the right to housing is security of tenure. With the affordability crisis noted in Maryland by its Department of Housing and Community Development, and the corresponding threat of increased homelessness, this bill is a vital piece of the puzzle in protecting both tenants and communities from the instability which is caused by homelessness.

MLA often represents clients whose landlords threatened them with eviction because someone called the police, and the police came to their premises to investigate the complaint or to protect the tenant initiating the complaint. Sometimes the police or other emergency service providers are called by the tenant or someone in their family because the tenant is suffering a medical emergency. On occasion we have seen landlords attempt to use the peace order process to evict those who they regard as troublesome tenants. Typically, the landlord claims that the presence of the police at the property disturbs the common enjoyment of neighbors and constitutes a threat to the neighbors' life and safety.

Finally, evicting the tenant may be prompted by nuisance laws enacted in those jurisdictions and the landlord is attempting to protect themselves from possible sanction or loss of their property. This loophole in Maryland's nuisance law which allows these types of actions should be closed.

For these reasons—and based on the fundamental principle that no one should be evicted for trying to keep themselves safe—we ask for a favorable report on SB 450.

Sincerely,

/GC/

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Maryland Legal Aid
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