

March 26, 2024

Deedee Jacobsohn
North Bethesda, Maryland



Testimony on SB0370 - Position: Favorable
**Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program
and Fund - Establishment**

TO: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Deedee Jacobsohn, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Deedee Jacobsohn and I am a resident of District 16 in Montgomery County. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony **in support of SB0370: Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund - Establishment**. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice campaigns. Keeping Marylanders safely and securely housed has been a focus of our efforts for more than eight years.

Jewish tradition teaches us that housing is a right, and that we all must look out for each other and our communities, that *tzedakah* (justice) is an obligation to provide for the physical needs of community members. But this obligation does not rest solely upon us as individuals to help another individual. Instead, the *Mishnah* (the foundational work of rabbinic literature) states that the obligations to help community members in need can and should be discharged by the collective. In other words, people give resources to the government (through taxes) and the state distributes them to those in need. Preventing evictions through additional financial assistance fulfills our obligation to keep people housed and ensures that landlords receive the rent money they are due.

Along with other JUFJers, I have observed rent court in Rockville, where hundreds of cases are tried each week. Beyond the fact that there is not enough funding for every tenant to receive assistance, tenants who do not understand the system have trouble getting connected to resources they could benefit from.

I met a woman who, when faced with the threat of eviction from her apartment complex, had to move further away from her job, and was forced to take her kids out of their school. She ended up moving into a smaller, cheaper apartment with unhealthy living conditions. This move disrupted her support networks, her easy access to her job, and her children's schooling.

Children are some of the most heavily impacted by these abrupt moves. I began working as a pre-K paraeducator three months ago in Montgomery County Public Schools, and I have already seen how quickly children regress when their time at school is interrupted because of challenging home situations. Removing children from their friend groups, familiar teachers, and established routines—especially when the disruption is caused by a trauma like possible eviction—is devastating. Moreover, I work at a Community School where students and their families receive wraparound services including access to healthcare, counseling, healthy food, parental support, academic support, and extracurricular activities. Adding access to eviction prevention funds would ensure that parents have a familiar Liaison they can turn to for support, who will connect them to resources that will keep them housed and allow them to maintain access to the support their community and their Community School provide.

Maryland needs to invest in eviction prevention funds if it hopes to be a national leader in ending childhood poverty, improving education, ensuring safe housing for all, and leaving no one behind.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0370.**