

## Oral Testimony for Maryland Senate Bill 370

Good afternoon. My name is David Wheaton, and I am an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF). I am speaking in favor of Maryland Senate Bill 370. SB 370 would establish the Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program to help eligible student households avoid eviction. Housing stability is essential to children's well-being, development, and school performance. Unfortunately, Black children in Maryland are disproportionately likely to experience eviction and the significant negative consequences that result. SB 370 would improve outcomes for children, particularly Black children, by offering rental assistance funds to help families with school-aged children who are at risk of eviction stay in their homes, improving their educational and health outcomes.

Evictions disrupt nearly every facet of a family's life and negatively impact child health and development.<sup>1</sup> A Harvard Medical School study showed that an eviction can affect a child's health both through its acute effects and its cascading consequences that span multiple stages and settings of child development.<sup>2</sup> These consequences include school attendance issues, mental health issues, harms to neurodevelopment, and overall child health.<sup>3</sup>

Childhood eviction significantly and disproportionately disadvantages Black children. Nearly 20 percent of children born to Black mothers experience eviction, compared with only 11.3 percent of children born to white mothers.<sup>4</sup> Black households have the highest eviction removal count in Maryland—almost three times higher than the white resident eviction rate.<sup>5</sup> One in four Black Maryland children in rental households face the threat of eviction in a typical year.<sup>6</sup> An estimated 16,200 Maryland school children lived in shelters, on the street, doubled up with other families, or in hotels or motels during the year before the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> These numbers have increased in recent years as local, state, and national eviction moratoriums have expired and pandemic-related financial assistance has ended.

As currently written SB 370 gives someone's employment status as a way to determine if a family member is experiencing financial hardship. We believe that the program should be

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<sup>1</sup> Ramphal B, Keen R, Okuzuno SS, Ojogho D, Slopen N, *Evictions and Infant and Child Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review*, JAMA Netw Open, (2023), <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2803667>.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Cleo Bluthenthal, *The Disproportionate Burden of Eviction on Black Women*, Center for American Progress, (August 14, 2023), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-disproportionate-burden-of-eviction-on-black-women/>

<sup>5</sup> Tim Thomas, et al, *Baltimore Eviction Map*, The Eviction Study, (May 8, 2020), <https://evictionresearch.net/maryland/report/baltimore.html#:~:text=Black%20headed%20households%20had%20the,eviction%20rate%20of%205.2%25>).

<sup>6</sup> Maryland Eviction Prevention Funds Alliance, *Assessment of Maryland's Need for Eviction Prevention Funds (EPF) and the Estimated Fiscal Impact of EPF*, (December 19, 2023), [https://www.mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Assessment-of-Marylands-Need-for-EPF-and-Directional-Fiscal-Impacts-of-EPF\\_FINAL\\_2023.12.19-1.pdf](https://www.mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Assessment-of-Marylands-Need-for-EPF-and-Directional-Fiscal-Impacts-of-EPF_FINAL_2023.12.19-1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Federal Rental Assistance Fact Sheets: Maryland*, (January 19, 2022), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-rental-assistance-fact-sheets#MD>.

available to people who are working or receive federal benefits but are nevertheless at risk of eviction, not just those experiencing unemployment.

Rental assistance like what is offered in SB 370 offers the opportunity for families to fight housing instability and reduce the number of evictions. Researchers found that similar federal rental assistance programs both improved the consistency of school attendance for children and decreased the number of families living in shelters.<sup>8</sup> By reducing homelessness, housing instability, and poverty, rental assistance helps children avoid the adverse effects these problems have on their health, development, and education.<sup>9</sup>

For the reasons stated above, LDF strongly encourages the passage of SB 370 and urges that more funding be directed to expanding rental assistance programs across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. If you have any questions, please contact David Wheaton, Economic Justice Policy Fellow, at [dwheaton@naacpldf.org](mailto:dwheaton@naacpldf.org), or Amalea Smirniotopoulos, Senior Policy Counsel and Co-Manager of the Equal Protection Initiative, at [asmirniotopoulos@naacpldf.org](mailto:asmirniotopoulos@naacpldf.org).

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<sup>8</sup> Maryland Eviction Prevention Funds Alliance, *Assessment of Maryland's Need for Eviction Prevention Funds (EPF) and the Estimated Fiscal Impact of EPF*, (December 19, 2023), [https://www.mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Assessment-of-Marylands-Need-for-EPF-and-Directional-Fiscal-Impacts-of-EPF\\_FINAL\\_2023.12.19-1.pdf](https://www.mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Assessment-of-Marylands-Need-for-EPF-and-Directional-Fiscal-Impacts-of-EPF_FINAL_2023.12.19-1.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> WILL FISCHER, DOUGLAS RICE, AND ALICIA MAZZARA, *Research Shows Rental Assistance Reduces Hardship and Provides Platform to Expand Opportunity for Low-Income Families*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, (December 5, 2019), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/research-shows-rental-assistance-reduces-hardship-and-provides-platform-to-expand>.