



SB 370 – Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund - Establishment

Hearing of the Budget and Taxation Committee, January 31, 2024

Position: Favorable

Shepherd's Table urges you to support SB 370, which will create an eviction prevention funds program for families with children enrolled in Maryland's community schools.

Shepherd's Table is a direct and social services organization in downtown Silver Spring that has provided hot, nutritious, free meals to the unhoused and low-income community since 1983. Approximately 80% of our meal guests live in shelters or do not have a guaranteed place to sleep each night. With the rising number of evictions in Montgomery County, as well as the increase in our unhoused neighbors, Shepherd's Table knows that **eviction prevention is homelessness prevention**. As part of our work with the Montgomery County Racial Equity Network, we also participate in weekly rent court-watching efforts and observe that many tenants are families with young children. Each week, eviction court dockets have had upwards of 500 names, and our meal services have also had a record number of guests in recent months, causing us to extend meal times well past their usual hours. Housing and food insecurity are deeply linked, and both are on the rise in the state of Maryland.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is investing significant funds to assist families whose children are attending community schools. Located throughout Maryland, [Community Schools](#) support families by coordinating wraparound services like transportation, healthcare, counseling, and healthy food. **Without an investment in eviction prevention funds, students in community schools who are evicted will lose ready access to the support of their community school.**

Recent research also shows that preventing evictions stabilizes the family, the school, and the community. Students facing eviction are six times more likely to be chronically absent and four times more likely to not complete high school,¹ and students who have experienced housing insecurity were more likely to have a lower GPA as well as poorer mental health outcomes.² The National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that the graduation rate of children experiencing homelessness is less than 25%.³ **Families cannot thrive without safe, stable housing. Schools cannot thrive with a student body forced to live in unstable and deplorable conditions.**

[According to a recent research report by Stout Risius Ross on eviction prevention funds in Maryland, a fully funded program would more than pay for itself. Every dollar spent on eviction prevention saves the State \\$2.39.](#) A full \$40 million investment in eviction prevention would yield approximately \$92 million in cost savings or avoidance for the State by reducing homelessness and state-funded safety net costs

related to shelter, assisting students experiencing homelessness, health care, foster care, decreased incarceration, and the economic impacts of increased employment and income stability. **On education alone, Stout estimated that a fully funded eviction prevention funds program (about \$40 million) would provide \$23.75 million in benefits to the State through better student education outcomes and increased federal funds.**

Eviction prevention through rental assistance furthers gender and racial equity. Women-led (70%) and Black-led (74%) households have avoided eviction with help from the state's current emergency rental assistance program. They likely will be evicted at much higher rates unless the Governor and General Assembly take immediate action.

We understand that the bill sponsor, Sen. Hettleman, will work with advocates, the Maryland State Dept. of Education, and the Dept. of Housing and Community Development to refine the program's administrative structure and minimize the burden on community school coordinators. We also understand and support changing the current prioritization in the bill to address better the needs of families who are homeless or most at risk of homelessness.

Maryland cannot be a national leader in “leaving no one behind,” ending childhood poverty, righting the racial wrongs of the past, and ensuring shelter for all without investing in eviction prevention funds.

Shepherd's Table **urges you to move favorably on SB 370.**

For more information, contact our Advocacy Coordinator Brenna Olson at bolson@shepherdstable.org

¹ <https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/study-homeless-and-highly-mobile-students-san-mateo-county/housing-instability-and>

² Mariah Kornbluh, et al., Exploring Housing Insecurity in Relation to Student Success, J Am Coll Health, Apr. 2022.

³ Health Care for the Homeless, Homelessness in Maryland, <https://www.hchmd.org/homelessness-maryland> (last visited Dec. 1, 2023).