

Levy Johnson, Co-Chair of The Baltimore City Youth Action Board

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

I, Levy Johnson, Co-Chair of The Baltimore City Youth Action Board, urge you to support SB 370, which will create an eviction prevention funds program for families with children enrolled in Maryland’s community schools.

My experience of homelessness as a minor profoundly impacted my life’s trajectory, diverting me from being a thriving student and athlete to facing significant challenges. These struggles led to difficulties in maintaining focus on education and contributed to a shift towards employment as my primary concern before the age of 16. During my time in high school I was an honor roll student and I was an exceptional athlete in football, Basketball, and track & field . Due to my housing instability I needed to sustain myself and fast therefore I prioritized working a job because it was crucial for my survival.

With housing instability and homelessness came additional associated hardships, including depression, precarious situations and substance abuse, further complicated my journey. Despite enrolling into college and maintaining good intentions, the instability in housing & my mental health struggles clouded my judgment making me feel as though I needed to do whatever it takes to survive. This eventually led me to being incarcerated at the young age of 18 due to me being emotionally unbalanced directly correlated from unstable living situations and mental health. To this day my life is affected when it comes to getting a job, obtaining stable housing, resources and equitable opportunities.

SB 370 would have been able to positively impact me during my years as a minor by allowing me to focus on my education,not forcing me into adulthood at a young age. This bill would give youth the opportunity to overcome homelessness and get a fair chance at life. As the Co-Chair of The Baltimore City Youth Action Board I have spoken with youth who are feeling hopeless due to their housing instability.This Bill can majorly change the outcome of youth lives by acting as a preventative measure to combat homelessness, mental health, and criminalization of youth homelessness. This narrative underscores the profound impact of housing instability on one's life path and the struggles faced in trying to overcome these adversities.

For these reasons I urge that you support SB 370.