



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT

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

Homeless Persons Representation Project (HPRP) urges the Committee to support SB 370, which will prevent evictions and homelessness for Maryland children and families by providing rental assistance to eligible student households at community schools.

HPRP is a non-profit civil legal aid organization that provides free legal services to Marylanders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness on issues that create barriers to housing and economic stability. HPRP provides direct services through offices serving Baltimore City, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County, and advocates for policies that will prevent and end homelessness statewide. HPRP's Homeless Youth Initiative (HYI) serves youth and young adults under age 25. Most of HPRP's client households include school-age children or older youth who have been students in community schools.

SB 370 promotes housing and educational stability for families, and will further gender and racial equity, by addressing an urgent unmet need for rental assistance. Most of the households that HPRP represents in eviction proceedings are headed by single mothers with school-age children. This is not surprising given that single-parent renter households had the highest cost-burden rate nationally in 2022 at 62% percent.¹ In addition, most households, especially those with children, do not have sufficient residual income to pay rent arrears.² During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased government investment in rental assistance provided an essential lifeline for HPRP's clients when legal assistance alone could not prevent eviction. With help from the state's emergency rental assistance program, women-led (70%) and Black-led (74%) households avoided eviction. This equitable and effective two-generation approach to supporting families stabilized the family's housing, enabling parents to pursue or sustain employment, and eliminated barriers to educational stability for children. Students facing eviction are 6 times more likely to be chronically absent and 4 times more likely to not complete high school,³ and students who have experienced housing insecurity were more likely to have a lower GPA as well as poorer mental health outcomes.⁴ The National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that the graduation rate of children experiencing homelessness is less than 25%.⁵ Unfortunately, almost all of this COVID rental assistance funding has been exhausted and the funding will no longer be available when SB 370 takes effect.

In addition, rental assistance is a sound investment that avoids the human and fiscal costs of eviction and homelessness. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future is investing significant funds to assist families whose children are attending community schools. Located throughout Maryland, community schools provide support for families by coordinating wraparound services like transportation, healthcare, counseling, and healthy food. Without an investment in rental assistance funds, students in community schools who are evicted will lose access to the support of their community school. Recent research is clear

that preventing evictions stabilizes the family, the school, and the community. [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 education outcomes for students and an increase in federal funds. The SB 370 Fiscal and Policy Note indicates that the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DCHD) estimates that the full \$10 million in rental assistance funding included in the bill will likely to serve 3,000 to 3,500 families per year. With many families likely including multiple children, the benefits and cost savings associated with this investment are significant.

Effective and equitable administration of rental assistance programs is critical to their positive impact. We understand that the bill sponsor, Sen. Hettleman, will work with advocates, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Department of Housing and Community Development to refine the administrative structure of the program and minimize the burden on community school staff. As the SB 370 Fiscal and Policy Note recognizes, MSDE and community school coordinators at each school currently lack the capacity to effectively implement the proposed program. HPRP supports the anticipated investment in staffing. We also strongly support changing the current prioritization of rental assistance funding in the bill to better address the needs of families who are homeless or most at risk of homelessness, and to ensure equitable implementation of the program.

In sum, families cannot thrive without safe, stable housing. Schools cannot thrive with a student body forced to live in unstable and deplorable conditions. Maryland cannot be a national leader in leaving no one behind, ending childhood poverty, advancing gender and racial equity, and ensuring shelter for all without investing in eviction prevention funds.

HPRP urges you to move favorable on SB 370. For more information, please contact Ingrid Lofgren, Director of HPRP's Homeless Youth Initiative, at ilofgren@hprplaw.org or (410)656-9975.

¹ America's Rental Housing, https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard_JCHS_Americas_Rental_Housing_2024.pdf (last visited January 30, 2024)

² *Id.*, stating that renter households earning less than \$30,000 annually had an all-time low median residual income of just \$310 per month and among those renters it was found that those with high cost burdens fared even worse with a median residual income of just \$170.

³ <https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/study-homeless-and-highly-mobile-students-san-mateo-county/housing-instability-and>

⁴ Mariah Kornbluh, et al., Exploring Housing Insecurity in Relation to Student Success, *J Am Coll Health*, Apr. 2022.

⁵ Health Care for the Homeless, Homelessness in Maryland, <https://www.hchmd.org/homelessness-maryland> (last visited Dec. 1, 2023).