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## Disability Rights Maryland

January 30, 2024

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

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Disability Rights Maryland (DRM – formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the federally designated Protection and Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities and live in safe, affordable and accessible housing.

DRM urges you to **support** SB 370, which will create an eviction prevention funds program for families with children enrolled in Maryland’s community schools. Eviction prevention funds are critical to further DRM’s work ensuring housing stability and community inclusion for families with disabilities in Maryland.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) reports that families with disabilities represent 17% of extremely low income (ELI) renter households in Maryland.<sup>a</sup> Of all ELI households in Maryland, 75% are “extremely cost burdened,” meaning that those families routinely spend more than 50% of their monthly income on housing and utility costs.<sup>b</sup> These disparities put families, especially those with individuals with disabilities at risk of eviction and homelessness. SB 370 works to address these shortfalls by providing much needed eviction prevention funds.

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 eviction prevention funds, students in community schools who are evicted will lose ready access to the support of their community school.**

**Recent research is clear that preventing evictions stabilizes the family, the school, and the community.** Students facing eviction are 6 times more likely to be chronically absent and 4 times more likely to not complete high school,<sup>1</sup> and students who have experienced housing insecurity were more likely to have a lower GPA as well as poorer mental health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that the graduation rate of children experiencing homelessness is less than 25%.<sup>3</sup> **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

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<sup>a</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), *Housing Needs by State: Maryland (2021)*, available at: <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/maryland>.

<sup>b</sup> *Id.*

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.**

**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 and likely will be evicted at much higher rates unless the Governor and General Assembly take 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 administrative structure of the program and minimize the burden on community school coordinators. We also understand and support changing the current prioritization in the bill to better address 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.**

**DRM urges you to support SB 370. For more information, please contact:**

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<sup>1</sup> Stanford University's John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities, Housing Instability and Educational Outcomes of San Mateo County Youth (2022), *available at*:

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

<sup>2</sup> Mariah Kornbluh, Jennfier Wilking, Susan Roll & Robin Donatello (2022): Exploring housing insecurity in relation to student success, Journal of American College Health, DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2022.2068016, *available at*: <https://housingresearchgroup.sites.csuchico.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Exploring-housing-insecurity-in-relation-to-student-success.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Health Care for the Homeless, Homelessness in Maryland (2023), *available at*: <https://www.hchmd.org/homelessness-maryland>.