
**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

Public Justice Center urges you to support SB 370, which will create an eviction prevention funds program for families with children enrolled in Maryland’s community schools. Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that assists over 800 renters and their families each year. As part of Renters United Maryland, we stand with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing. Eviction prevention funds are often life changing for our client-families with children facing eviction. Magdalena Escobar’s experience provides an example:



Magdalena Escobar, her husband, and three children have resided in their Greenbelt apartment for the past five years. Ms. Escobar had to leave her job as a cook in a local restaurant to take care of the significant, emerging medical needs of her son. At the same time, her husband lost hours at his job. They quickly fell behind on the rent and faced an eviction filing. They applied for eviction prevention funds from Prince George’s County to help pay the back-due rent, and retained an attorney from CASA to negotiate a lower rent. They received the eviction prevention funds in September 2023, and it changed their lives: “Eviction prevention funds were a huge relief. I had an eviction scheduled for the next week, and after so many calls and help from CASA, the funds came through. My kids didn’t want to go to school because they were worried they were going to come home and our things would be on the street. My son and daughter were already struggling at school, and the pending eviction made it so much worse. When we told the kids the rent had been paid, they were so happy that they started shouting and yelling. Now they smile more and worry much less. Also, my lawyer learned that I was being charged the wrong amount of rent, so the landlord lowered the rent, making it more affordable. My husband is getting more hours at work, and we intend to stay in our neighborhood for the long term. I needed these funds, they really helped me, but I see lots of neighbors who still need this money. I got this help when I needed it, and I hope that others get this help when they need it to keep their families housed.”

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.**

Preventing evictions stabilizes the family, the school, and the community. 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. **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.**

Key Findings

- Maryland is investing \$3.8 billion a year to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Unfortunately, *the wrap-around services based in community schools do not include housing stability support.*
- Eviction prevention funds ensure that families do not lose access to community school services. And, according to Stout, *such a program would provide \$23.75 million in benefits to the state* through better education outcomes for students and an increase in federal funds.
- *Students facing eviction are 6 times more likely to be chronically absent and 4 times more likely to not complete high school,⁹ and students who experienced housing insecurity were more likely to have a lower GPA as well as poorer mental health outcomes.¹⁰*
- The National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that the *graduation rate of children experiencing homelessness is less than 25%.¹¹*

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. **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.**

Public Justice Center is a member of Renters United Maryland and urges you to move **favorable on SB 370.** For more information contact: Matt Hill, 410-625-9409, ext. 229, hillm@publicjustice.org