

February 20, 2024

Testimony on House Bill 693
Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024
House Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is a statewide association of more than 1800 nonprofit organizations and institutions. We urge you to support House Bill 693 and approve Governor Moore's proposed Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024 to expand protections and resources available to Maryland tenants.

House Bill 693 will:

- 1) establish an Office of Tenant Rights in the Department of Housing and Community Development responsible for providing renters with information about their rights under law and creating a Tenant's Bill of Rights;
- 2) address the high eviction filing rate in the nation by increasing the eviction filing fee and preventing it from being passed on to renters;
- 3) create new dedicating funding for the Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program and the Maryland Legal Services Corporation Fund established under § 11-402 of the Human Services Article;
- 4) reduce the allowable security deposit from two months rent to one month;
- 5) create a powerful new pathway to homeownership by creating a statewide 'right of first refusal', allowing renters the right to purchase their home if being sold;
- 6) modify the state's new rental voucher program to provide prioritization of vouchers for families with children under the age of five and for pregnant women.

Maryland Nonprofits' broad membership includes organizations serving the entire spectrum of individual, family and community needs across our state. This perspective allows us to see better than most that resolving poverty and the social and economic inequities that burden the lives of too many Marylanders, particularly families and communities of color, requires addressing the multiple interconnected challenges that they face every day. Factors such as lack of available transportation, food insecurity, unaffordable childcare, and access to adequate health care and services, all impact the health and education of children, the opportunity to access to jobs and stable employment, the ability to build a sustaining level of wealth, and more. Access to safe, stable, and affordable housing is essential to meeting most if not all of these needs.

Housing instability is a serious problem for low- and moderate-income renters – Maryland saw well over 18,000 evictions last year. Even if they sacrifice to pay a rent increase, tenants are subject to non-renewal without any cause, even if they are willing to sacrifice to pay rent increases, if the landlord desires to find higher income tenants to pay even higher rents, or to remove a tenant ‘too demanding’ of services that are the landlord’s responsibility.

While House Bill 693 does not resolve all issues facing tenants in Maryland, and we will continue to support much needed increases in eviction prevention funding and services, measures like the creation of a statewide ‘right of first refusal for tenants’ and others in the Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024 are substantial steps forward.

We urge you to give House Bill 693 a **favorable report**.