



MSBA Main Office
520 West Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-685-7878 | msba.org

Annapolis Office
200 Duke of Gloucester Street
Annapolis, MD 21401
410-269-6464 | msba.org

To: Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee and House
Judiciary Committee
From: Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA)
Subject: HB 693 – Renters’ Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024
Date: February 16, 2024
Position: **Support**

The Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) joins its partner, the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, and **supports House Bill 693 – Renters’ Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024**. HB 693 increases maximum surcharges for certain eviction and prohibits the District Court from assigning the surcharge against a tenant; alters the priority and criteria in the Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program; establishes a new state Office of Tenant Rights; and limits the maximum security deposit required by a residential lease to 1 month's rent.

MSBA represents more attorneys than any other organization across the state in all practice areas. Through its advocacy committees and various practice-specific sections, MSBA monitors and takes positions on legislation that protects the legal profession, preserves the integrity of the judicial system, and ensures access to justice for Marylanders.

*Note: MSBA supports all aspects of the bill except on the issue of a tenant’s right of first refusal, specifically: (1) Page 8, Line 5 through Page 12, Line 23, and (2) Page 14, Lines 20-21, as this is a controversial issue within our membership. MSBA takes no position on this issue and defers to its practice-specific sections to provide any information and testimony on this portion of the bill.

MSBA Supports Increased Funding for Civil Legal Aid

MSBA supports access to justice for Marylanders, funding of the justice system, and equal justice for all. MSBA remains a strong advocate for the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC), an entity that provides a significant resource to Marylanders for direct legal services. HB 693’s proposed increase in the MLSC Fund through a filing surcharge increase would continue to allow Maryland’s high-quality legal services reach the state’s low-income and vulnerable populations.

As the gap between legal needs and available services continues to grow, increased civil legal aid funding would immediately address both the current and future need for services in cases that affect the basic human needs of Marylanders, including shelter, safety, and health. HB 693 would provide meaningful funding for low-income persons facing evictions, and also support greater technological innovation, training, and a broader range of services from aid providers. Investments in civil legal aid now will



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provide overall cost-savings to the state through reduced fees for emergency health care, counseling, and shelter costs.

MSBA Supports Increased Protections for Renters Through New Office and Bill of Rights

MSBA supports the establishment of an Office of Tenant Rights in the Department of Housing and Community Development, tasked with educating and informing renters about their rights under the law and referring relevant landlord-tenant cases to the appropriate law enforcement agency or other agency. The Office will provide tenants with greater awareness of legal remedies and earlier access to resources to prevent evictions, including a Maryland Tenants' Bill of Rights, a publicly accessible website with relevant housing resources, and an understanding of how to report housing violations.

For these reasons, MSBA respectfully urges a **favorable report on House Bill 693**.

Contact: Shaoli Katana, Advocacy Director (shaoli@msba.org, 410-387-5606)