

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 693:
Renter's Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024**

TO: Hon. Marc Korman, Chair, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee
FROM: Daniel L. Hatcher, Professor of Law, University of Baltimore, Civil Advocacy Clinic
DATE: February 16, 2024
RE: HB 693 – Support

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 693. I am a law professor in the University of Baltimore's Civil Advocacy Clinic, in which law students represent low-income clients in wide variety of poverty related matters—including housing. In addition to our clinic's support for this bill, our law school as a whole supports efforts to strengthen access to counsel for vulnerable litigants. Dean Ronald Weich is an ex officio member of the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, which supports this bill.

HB 693 is needed to protect the rights of low-income Marylanders.

In the law school clinic that I have taught for almost twenty years, we encounter individuals who are striving for economic stability to support their families, to support their communities, and to be productive members of our local and state economies. As the individuals strive to do well in the face of numerous difficulties, housing concerns can make their struggles even more difficult. The instability and trauma that can result from the threat of losing housing can set off a chain of events of increasing struggles with poverty that can become almost impossible to overcome. If housing can be better stabilized, everything else can be better stabilized.

HB 693 will expand crucially needed access to legal representation for tenants to protect their rights and help reduce housing instability. In my years of witnessing low-income individuals encounter confusing court process, it is clear that access to counsel helps the individuals better navigate the process—and greatly helps the courts in ensuring that justice can be pursued.

HB 693 will help all of us.

With greater access to counsel, stability for low-income tenants will be improved, and stability for Maryland's communities will be improved.

It is Crucial that HB 693 prohibits pass-through of the filing fee.

A crucial part of HB 693 is that the bill prohibits district courts from assigning the filing fees against the tenants. Without this prohibition, the filing fees could become harmful to the low-income litigants and increase their economic instability.

I therefore support HB 693 and respectfully request a favorable report.