



Jeniece Jones, Executive Director
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409
jonesj@publicjustice.org

HB693 Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024

In the House - Hearing 2/20 at 1:00 p.m. (Environment and Transportation)

Position: FAVORABLE

Economic Growth and Inclusive Constituent Well-being Through Strategic Legal Services Funding

At the Public Justice Center (PJC), our mission is to promote economic justice and race equity through legal advocacy, policy reform, and community partnerships. We are committed to dismantling systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality and injustice in Maryland. Our work spans various areas, including housing rights, access to education, and employment anti-discrimination, focusing on uplifting the most vulnerable members of our community. Within this context of our mission, I express our strong endorsement of House Bill 693, the Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024.

As Executive Director at PJC, I endorse House Bill 693, the Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024, which signifies a crucial step toward fostering a more equitable Maryland. This legislation introduces essential reforms, such as increasing eviction proceeding surcharges to ensure fairness and other measures that protect tenants. These measures are vital for promoting economic growth and race equity.

A key aspect of this bill is its emphasis on providing well-trained legal services staff, including attorneys, which is crucial for addressing disparities in our housing and other interconnected systems. The return on investment (ROI) from investing in access to skilled legal professionals is profound, not only in economic terms by mitigating the harms of evictions and lessening the demand for emergency

^{^1} Stout Risius Ross, LLC. (February 2020). "The Economic Impact of Civil Legal Services in New York State." This report provides compelling evidence of the economic benefits and savings to communities from investments in legal aid services.

^{^2} Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Crown Publishing Group. This work underscores the crucial role of housing stability in personal and community well-being, supporting the case for legal services funding.

housing but also in fostering a society where fairness and equity prevail. House Bill 693 represents a dedicated effort to uplift and secure the welfare of every Maryland resident, ensuring that our communities can thrive in unity.

Maximizing Economic Growth Through Well-Trained Legal Services Funding

Investing in legal services transcends mere expenditure, representing a high-return investment crucial for catalyzing economic growth and stability. The Stout Risius Ross report illuminates the significant return on investment from funding legal services, showing how every dollar allocated to preventing evictions and resolving legal disputes saves state and local governments substantial amounts by avoiding the costs associated with homelessness, unemployment, and healthcare crises.^{^1} This approach ensures a robust economic foundation, nurturing a just, thriving economic environment and prosperous communities.

Ensuring Constituent Well-being with Access to Legal Services

Beyond the economic benefits, the commitment to comprehensive access to legal services is fundamentally about enhancing the life quality of every Marylander. Access to justice, stable housing, and secure employment are essential for personal well-being and community health. Legal services attorneys are instrumental in this context, providing advocacy and protection that prevent legal challenges from becoming crises that can irreversibly impact lives. Echoing Matthew Desmond's insights in "Evicted," stable housing facilitated by legal representation is vital for individuals and families striving for a better life, highlighting the indispensable role of legal services in societal prosperity.^{^2}

This investment in legal services ensures a resilient support system for those facing legal challenges, thereby fostering a society that is equitable, just, and inclusive. It empowers our constituents to live with dignity, seize opportunities, and contribute to our state's economic and social fabric. By endorsing HB 693, Maryland reaffirms its dedication to economic prosperity, underscored by the core values of justice and equity.

Conclusion

Supporting House Bill 693 signifies a commitment to a holistic development strategy for Maryland, recognizing the interconnected nature of economic prosperity and the well-being of its people. The Maryland General Assembly's backing of this legislation will send a strong message about our collective priorities and values, emphasizing our dedication to creating an environment where every citizen can flourish.

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I urge your robust support for HB 693, confident in its capacity to transform Maryland's economic landscape and enrich the lives of its residents. The Public Justice Center looks forward to witnessing the positive change this strategic investment in legal services will bring to our communities.

Thank you for considering this critical piece of legislation. Together, we can forge a more prosperous, equitable, and thriving Maryland for all.

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