



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 946

Tenant Safety Act of 2024

Judicial Proceedings
March 7, 2024

Submitted by Mark Huffman, Co-Chair

Member Agencies:

211 Maryland

Anne Arundel County Food Bank

Baltimore Jewish Council

Behavioral Health System Baltimore

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Energy Advocates

Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Family League of Baltimore

Fuel Fund of Maryland

Job Opportunities Task Force

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,
Inc.

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Loyola University Maryland

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Community Action
Partnership

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Paul's Place

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 946, which reforms the rent escrow process to make it easier for tenants to work together to hold their landlords accountable for severe conditions of disrepair that threaten life, health, or safety.

Rent escrow is where tenants pay their rent into a court-controlled fund, rather than to a landlord. This makes it possible for tenants to legally withhold rent when landlords fail to make appropriate and needed repairs to the building. Current rent escrow law is broken and does not hold landlords accountable for failing to repair threats to life, health, and safety. This affects not only renting families but entire communities that have to deal with neglected and blighted properties.

The Tenant Safety Act will make it easier for tenants with the same issues and landlord to join in a single rent escrow case. If a landlord refuses to make repairs, then a tenant will normally pay a reduced rent (by 50% in most cases) into escrow until repairs are made. This will help tenants, who do not have the full amount the landlord claims is due, to still hold the landlord accountable. At the end of the case, the Court still decides how much is due to each party.

For claims of past-due rent, this bill would clarify that tenants should not have to pay the full amount of rent if the landlord refused to fix major defects. It would also hold landlords accountable for serious mold hazards.

This bill will level the playing field by allowing a tenant to recover attorney's fees and costs – if they win. Landlords already have this ability through their leases. This will encourage more attorneys to take on tenants' cases.

This bill passed by the House in 2023 has been revised to address concerns raised by the Senate.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 946.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.