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January 29, 2024

To: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Kira Wilpone-Welborn, Assistant Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division

Re: Senate Bill 171 – Landlord and Tenant - Office of Home Energy Programs - Financial Assistance (SUPPORT)

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General (the “Division”) supports Senate Bill 171 sponsored by Senator Malcolm Augustine. Senate Bill 171 requires landlords to accept funds from the Office of Home Energy Programs for utility services that a tenant is obligated to pay. Senate Bill 171 further requires landlords to furnish documentation that is otherwise unavailable to tenants that establishes the tenant’s eligibility for assistance from the Office.

Landlord-tenant complaints are consistently among the top complaints received from consumers each year by the Consumer Protection Division. In 2020, the Maryland General Assembly enacted the HOME Act, which provided that a renter should not face discrimination in their access or maintenance of their housing due to their source of income, including “any government or private assistance, grant, loan, or rental assistance program.” *See* State Government Article § 20-701(J)(2)(II). Notwithstanding the HOME Act, the Division has received complaints from consumers, advocates, and rental assistance program administrators that many Maryland landlords refuse to provide the information necessary for tenants to complete applications for financial assistance or refuse to accept funds awarded to eligible renters. Allowing Maryland landlords to reject funds or refuse to provide relevant documentation to assist renters in obtaining financial assistance violates, at the very least, the spirit of the HOME Act. A favorable vote on Senate Bill 171 would further underscore and solidify the

General Assembly's intent to prevent and denounce the discrimination renters face when their finances come directly from the government.

For these reasons, the Division requests the Judicial Proceedings Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 171.

cc: The Honorable Malcolm Augustine
Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee