

SB0481- Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024

Stance: Favorable

Testimony: My name is Adiena Britt and I reside in the 45th Legislative District. I am an owner of my home, but have many friends and relatives of friends that are renters throughout Baltimore City. I am writing in favor of SB0481, but would like to provide some additional information that should be considered regarding renter's rights.

Firstly, if the legislature is going to develop, or redevelop a Maryland Tenants Bill of Rights; you will need to understand FROM actual renters what it is that they are being put through at this current time. I was involved with the process of attempting to rent an apartment with a friend of mine this past Summer. I was appalled at what I witnessed. Here are the things I feel the Legislature needs to consider when drafting and creating a Renter's Bill of Rights:

Upon arriving at the "Rental Office" to apply, the person I was with needed to pay a \$25 fee for some kind of background check and "application fee" that was non-refundable once the process was started. Landlords charge this all over the City, especially if they are a corporation rental agency. If a person is "denied" for any reason, they still do not receive this back. This means that if a person applies for apartments in several places, they are out this fee for Each and Every place that they apply. A steady flow of income for these rich corporations that are literally taking money from people that cannot afford to just hand over \$25 since they're already living paycheck to paycheck.

If that's not bad enough, the rental agent told my friend that once their credit was checked, they could be charged as much as two times the rent for a double security deposit; meaning they would have to come up with THREE MONTHS worth of rent in order to just move in. I feel this is addressed in this bill, but would love to have this in writing in my testimony. In relation to this, once the person is actually "approved" and already living in the apartments, if they wish to move within the facility to a different unit, they are CHARGED AGAIN all of what I stated above. The \$25 application fee, even though they were already approved, and another security deposit! How are they allowed to put people through this process again when they've already been through it?

Another piece the legislature should be considering is Utility companies. Specifically BGE, but also those like Comcast that supply wi-fi which is now a necessity for living. I witnessed the rental agent put my friend in touch with BGE in order to have the electricity bill turned over into their name as opposed to the Rental Corporation's. BGE charged \$175 "security deposit"! So a person, most likely making minimum wage, or not much more can typically need to pay Two to Three month's rent, \$25 application fee, AND \$175 to have the electric turned over to their name! I will ask you all, Can YOU come up with that kind of money in less than a month at your rate of pay? Let alone someone making less than \$20 an hour, sometimes much less. Comcast at least had the Affordable Connectivity Program, but even that is guaranteed and they play just as many games. They also require a deposit of \$30 in order to enroll and then they take a month or more to process that application.

In essence, if a rental unit costs \$675 (which is for a studio with no bedroom typically) a person making minimum wage and living paycheck to paycheck will need to come up with anywhere from \$1560-\$2230 in a month's time in order to move in! Would you be able to come up with that? Would you still be able to eat? Do your laundry? Pay your phone bill? Afford transportation for your job? Please take all of these things into consideration and have actual renters provide input for a Bill of Rights that will directly impact and affect them. Thank you.