



NAACP

Maryland
STATE CONFERENCE

**SB 644 – Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Just Cause
Judiciary Proceedings
Position: Favorable**

February 16, 2024

The Honorable Senator Smith, Chair
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Honorable Senator Smith and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland State Conference of the NAACP. We support Senate Bill 644, Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Just Cause, which is currently before the Environment and Transportation Committee. We ask that all members of the committee support this very important legislation that provides enables legislation that would give authority to Maryland counties, including Baltimore City, to establish “just cause” or “good cause” limitations on lease non-renewals.

This legislation introduced by Senators Muse, Carter and Sydnor will allow policy makers the ability to determine “just cause” policies that may be needed in their localities. Without this enabling bill, counties are preempted from enacting legal protections for Maryland families who face increasingly unstable housing and fears of retaliation and displacement.

Currently, Maryland is a “no cause” state which allows landlord to non-renew without any stated cause. Working families and their children may face the threat of displacement, even when they follow the rules. Landlords create arbitrary policies and tenants face increasing rents that are required to stay in their communities and keep their children in their local school. When tenants speak up, they face a likely “non-renewal” at the end of their lease and displacement from their community.

Research demonstrates that Maryland has seen a spike in many “no-cause”, evictions, known as “Tenant Holding Over” evictions– a 117% increase in average Tenant Holding Over complaint filings each month since 2020. “Nearly half of the U.S. renter households reported experiencing significant pressure to move during the previous 6 months.” HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, “Pressure to Move and Forced Moves Among U.S. Renter Households: Findings From New Questions in the Household Pulse Survey” (Sept. 19, 2023) (based on June-Aug. 2023 data). HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, “Pressure to Move and Forced Moves Among U.S. Renter Households: Findings from New Questions in the Household Pulse Survey” (Sept. 19, 2023) (based on June-Aug. 2023 data).

Since 2008, just cause eviction legislation has been introduced 9 times – including multiple statewide bills, as well as bills specific to Prince George’s County and Montgomery County. During the COVID-19 state of emergency, Howard County unsuccessfully attempted to prohibit lease non-renewals while Baltimore City passed a short-term provision to require just cause for lease non-renewals until 6 months after the state of emergency’s end. These efforts demonstrate a sustained desire in Maryland localities for the authority to enact just cause.

At least 5 states, the District of Columbia (since 1985), and 16 localities including Philadelphia (since 2018) have adopted just cause eviction laws. New Jersey’s just cause law (since 1974) demonstrates that the benefit of just cause far outweighs the hypothetical that it hurts development. “Something in the Garden State is clearly working. According to data from the Eviction Lab, New Jersey cities such as Trenton, Paterson, Jersey City, and West New York have among the lowest eviction rates in the country. Meanwhile, construction is absolutely exploding.”

Additionally, looking at 4 localities in California, a 2019 Princeton/Eviction Lab study finds that "just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates. Given the budget limitations of many states and municipalities to fund other solutions to the eviction crisis, passage of just cause eviction ordinances appears to be a relatively low-cost, effective policy solution."

SB 644 recognizes that local legislatures want to assist renting families with stable housing so that they are able contribute long-term to the workforce and the local economy. Requiring that a landlord state a legitimate reason for an eviction through lease non-renewal eviction boosts the stability of families, neighborhoods, and communities.

According to evictionresearch.net, black households are 3 times more likely to face evictions. (<https://evictionresearch.net/maryland/report/baltimore.html#:~:text=46%25%20more%20female%20headed%20households,1%2C614%20White%20evictions>). They further state “eviction reinforces poverty and limits housing opportunities for the nation’s most economically vulnerable”. The NAACP advocates for the most vulnerable and this is why we believe HB 477 is important to the most vulnerable including communities of color.

For these reasons, we support SB 644 and strongly urge your support to protect tenants and all the citizens of Maryland.

In Service,

NaShona Kess, Esq., MLS
Executive Director
NaShonakess.mdnaacp@gmail.com