



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

January 30, 2024

SB 162
Landlord and Tenant - Termination of Residential Lease - Limitation of Liability
for Rent

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 162. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 162 would provide limitations on liability for the abatement of a rental property by a person with a bona fide intellectual or developmental disability or mental disorder. The limitation on liability for the remaining months rent due for the lease period would be applied only in stances where a counselor, therapist or psychologist has substantiated the diagnosis in writing and where the leased premises is not conducive to the management of the tenant's condition. Maryland law already affords tenants with these exact protections relative to medical conditions, similarly requiring the certification of a physician to substantiate.

The Conference strongly supports legislation that both supports the dignity of those living with intellectual or developmental disabilities, as well as acceptable housing conditions for all. In its pastoral statement, *The Right to a Decent Home*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) asserted that, "The protection of the human dignity of every person and the right to a decent home require both individual action and structural policies and practices." (USCCB, 1975) The USCCB has also stated that, "The Church has traditionally viewed housing, not as a commodity, but as a basic human right" and that the "right to housing is a consistent theme in our teaching and is found in the Church's *Charter of the Rights of the Family*." (*Homelessness and Housing: A Human tragedy, A Moral Challenge*, USCCB, 1988)

Equally as important is the inherent dignity of those in the disabilities community. The Church calls for the defense of policies that would "enable the individual with the disability to achieve the fullest measure of personal development of which he or she is capable. These include

the right to equal opportunity in education, in employment, in housing, and in health care, as well as the right to free access to public accommodations, facilities, and services.” (*Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities, A Framework of Access and Inclusion*. USCCB, 1998).

When a person with intellectual or developmental disabilities is unable to live in a space that is sufficiently accommodating to their needs, it can represent an affront to their human dignity. Through this bill, Maryland would take reasonable steps to ensure that its residents with intellectual or developmental disabilities are afforded the dignity to relocate to a more accommodating living circumstances without significant financial or legal liability. For this, we request a favorable report on House Bill 162.