

SB 644 Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

Hearing before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, Feb 16, 2023

Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

Thank you for agreeing to hear my testimony,

My name is Mike English, I live in downtown Silver Spring and I am here to speak strongly in support of this just cause enabling legislation, and I say this as someone who spends just as much, if not more time advocating for the production of more housing as I do pushing for renter protections.

While I'm speaking only in my personal capacity today, I'm involved with multiple organizations that push to make housing production easier, more predictable, and more affordable, and have written numerous pro housing, urbanist opinion pieces for various publications. I've also been called a developer shill, or something to that effect, enough times in enough meetings about proposed apartment complexes or zoning changes that I've quite literally lost count.

I bring all this up only to say that while there is such a thing as a renter protection that can go "too far" and do more harm than good in the long run by limiting the supply of housing Just cause eviction isn't one of them. I, and most other "YIMBYs" and YIMBY organizations either don't spend much time worrying about just cause, or actively support it, because it works well in tandem with abundant housing to provide leverage and stability to renters.

This law would not prevent a landlord from not renewing a lease for a tenant that fails to pay, violates the lease, or meets other "just causes" for non renewal, and landlords would still be able to deny renewal if they, for example, wanted to take the home off the rental market altogether. It is not a "lease for life" as some allege.

All it means is this. "If you are going to continue to rent the home out, the person currently renting it gets the first shot at renting it, unless you have a compelling reason not to offer it to them."

That's unambiguously good. Yes, housing is a market, and market principles apply, but it is also a, well, home, a place that is meant to be a relative constant in our lives that, while it may not last forever, does not change suddenly for no good reason.

That's all we're talking about here.

Development won't crater, and problem tenants won't be forever entrenched in a home. It *will* help prevent tenants being removed for retaliatory reasons, such as forming a tenants union or making consistent maintenance requests, and more generally help to give a little certainty that their safe harbor will stay their safe harbor.

