



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB481
Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024
Senate -Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 28th, 2024

Dear Honorable Chair Smith and Members of the Committee,

CASA is pleased to offer favorable testimony in support of **SB 481**.

SB 481 is important legislation that will help level the playing field and improve conditions for renters across Maryland. This bill will accomplish several important objectives, including standardizing renter's rights, stabilizing security deposits, and preventing evictions during extreme weather events. It also includes important provisions that will expand access to civil legal services for low-income Marylanders by dedicating a portion of increased filing fees to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC). Through our legal services and tenant organizing, CASA engages with renters across Maryland every day. Throughout the state, there are apartment communities where tenants suffer deplorable conditions, transgressions of personal privacy, and unjust treatment by property owners and managers. People fighting for dignified housing and treatment occurs from Montgomery County to Baltimore City, and many other jurisdictions in the state. However, the "rights" they have as tenants vary from county to county.

For example, Montgomery County has a strong tenant-landlord handbook that outlines the things tenants are entitled to when entering a lease as well as what a landlord can demand from a tenant. This is a powerful tool which empowers tenants to understand and defend their rights, including notification requirements the landlord must abide by before entering a dwellings and rights that tenant associations hold. Hence, fighting an unjust entry into a dwelling would be easier in Montgomery County compared to other places. This is not just a hypothetical as we see how tenant advocacy varies from county to county. Creating a powerful unified set of renter's rights that are valid across the state will reduce ambiguity and increase confidence among renters to demand what is right.

Another important provision of the Renter's Rights and Stabilization Act limits security deposits to one month rent, which lowers the cost of entry to housing for MD's lower-income residents; this is the difference between someone being able to sign a lease or having to delay to accumulate the required funds. Our members live check to check, so having more than two months rent can seem like an insurmountable barrier.

For these reasons, CASA urges a favorable report.