



Date of Hearing: February 16, 2024
Charles M. Koplík, Odenton, Maryland 21113

TESTIMONY ON SB0644 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

TO: Chair Senator Will Smith, Vice Chair Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Action in Montgomery (AIM), People Acting Together in Howard (PATH), and Anne Arundel Connecting Together (ACT). We are a coalition of three independent county organizations representing over 65 churches, mosques, synagogues and community groups.

AIM, ACT, and PATH are submitting this testimony in support of SB0644, Just Cause Termination.

I was at the statehouse yesterday with AIM, ACT, and PATH, lobbying for this legislation and our group included renters who were desperately worried about their security and the risk of eviction for no or little cause. You need to hear their stories and be responsible for their needs just as you look after the needs of landlords. Ancient Biblical texts say – “Those who lie in bed at night planning iniquity and designing evil...covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away. They defraud a person of their home; a person of their inheritance” — Micah 2: 1-3. The prophet Micah understood that housing is more than a roof over one’s head and that to deny a person safe housing is not only robbing them in the present but also robbing their family for generations to come.

Maryland has the highest rate of evictions of any US state bar none. That’s not a statistic of which to be proud. In 2018, Maryland’s eviction filing rate was 69.6% – an extreme outlier rate compared to the national average of nearly 8% (Estimating Eviction Prevalence Across the United States, Ashley Gromis, Ian Fellows, James R. Hendrickson and Matthew Desmond).

Landlords often retaliate against tenants who organize for their rights, demand that repairs be made, or complain about violations of laws about safe housing conditions. Sometimes this retaliation takes the form of refusing to renew their leases. “Just cause” laws protect tenants from this kind of retaliation, and from being evicted for no reason at all. These laws promote housing stability for tenants and neighborhoods.

This bill would allow counties to adopt “just cause” laws that meet local needs to require landlords to renew residential leases unless they have a “just cause” to terminate the lease such as wanting to occupy the property themselves, having a close relative move in, taking the property off the market, and tenant breach of lease.

We respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0644.