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SB47: Evidence – Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance – Fair Housing Testing

Hearing before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee on January 30, 2024

Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

I write in my professional capacity as the current Executive Director of the Public Justice Center (PJC) in Maryland and former Executive Director of Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio. This testimony is in support of SB57/HB392, which seeks to authorize fair housing testers to legally intercept communications under specific conditions.

The PJC actively works towards instigating systemic changes to establish a society founded on justice. Our focus is on utilizing legal avenues to remove barriers that impede economic and racial equity, through our various projects. The Human Right to Housing Project at PJC is our pivotal initiative aimed at safeguarding tenants from unlawful eviction practices, ensuring the maintenance of habitable housing conditions, and confronting exploitative landlord behaviors.

My seven years of experience at HOME is highlighted by the indispensable role of fair housing testing in unearthing and documenting hard to detect discriminatory practices in housing. In Ohio, fair housing testers are allowed to intercept communications during housing transactions. By authorizing fair housing testers to lawfully intercept communications, SB57/HB392 would offer a vital instrument for identifying and confronting covert discrimination that restricts access to safe, affordable, and quality housing in Maryland. Furthermore, this legislation incentivizes property managers to place greater emphasis on fair housing training, ensuring their staff are well-versed in legal compliance and best practices. This proactive approach in management fosters a more informed and equitable housing market, directly contributing to enhanced housing stability and the economic growth of Maryland families. Access to stable housing is a cornerstone for the well-being and economic advancement of families, and this bill could play a critical role in ensuring such access.

The essence of SB57/HB392 is in alignment with the objectives of the PJC. It provides a substantial legal framework to reinforce our endeavors in ensuring fair housing practices. This bill passage would be key to ensure fairness and equality in housing, which is central to the PJC's mission of promoting economic and racial justice.