



SB644: LANDLORD AND TENANT – RESIDENTIAL LEASES AND HOLDOVER TENANCIES – LOCAL JUST CAUSE TERMINATION PROVISIONS

HEARING BEFORE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE
2/16/2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

Connecting Individuals and Families who need Civil Legal Services with Volunteer Attorneys and Community Resources

Shore Legal Access, Inc. (formerly Mid-Shore Pro Bono) supports SB635. This bill would significantly improve housing stability, particularly in a housing-scarce area like the Eastern Shore. Localities that enact just cause termination provisions afforded by this measure will be able to provide tenants with a sense of security in their housing situation and prevent homelessness.

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Shore Legal Access (SLA) connects people on the Eastern Shore with limited financial means to legal representation and essential community resources. Each year, SLA helps over 3,000 people in our community access the legal system when they would otherwise be shut out. Our small legal team and network of volunteer lawyers provide free legal services for life planning, family law, landlord/tenant, foreclosure, and consumer debt. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure homes for children.

With limited housing resources available in our area, Shore Legal Access works diligently to keep tenants in their homes. We often encounter clients who are facing lease and holdover terminations and struggle to find alternative housing. Many of the tenants we work with in these scenarios have been renting a unit for many years and receive a termination with no explanation. In many instances, these situations evolve into Tenant Holding Over matters to be handled in the Courts. The filing of these matters stacks the odds against the tenant and further threatens their ability to secure housing. Rarely do the tenants remain in their homes to be spiteful or stubborn, but rather simply because they have nowhere else to go. For many, their only alternative is homelessness. Giving localities the power to enact just cause provisions not only affords housing security for families, but continues to hold tenants accountable for regular rent payments and to abide by the terms of their lease.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Princeton’s Eviction Lab¹ finds that “just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates.” Not only does this bill provide for housing security in the present moment, but also the opportunity to positively impact future housing security by reducing eviction filings against tenants.

For these reasons, Shore Legal Access supports SB644 and we urge the Committee’s support for this bill. If enacted, I fully intend to engage with my local legislatures to establish just cause termination ordinances in jurisdictions across the Eastern Shore. If you have any questions regarding our position on this bill, please contact Julia Jester, Housing Case Manager, at 410-690-8128 or julia@shorelegal.org.

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1. <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/effect-just-cause-eviction-ordinances-eviction-four-california-cities>