

Support for SB 644

Hearing of Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, Feb. 16, 2024

My name is Cynise Riley and without just cause eviction protections, I would likely have become homeless. I've lived in the same apartment building in Baltimore City since 2013. In 2021, I survived an incident of domestic violence. This was reported to Baltimore City police and the situation was resolved. My landlord was outraged and wouldn't listen when I tried to explain what had happened and how it was domestic violence related; instead he tried to evict me. He falsely claimed that I wasn't keeping the apartment clean and sent me a notice to non-renew my lease. To turn up the pressure, he even sent a notice of non-renewal to my sister who lived in the same building. When I refused to leave, he filed for eviction. I got legal representation, fought back and won the right to stay through a settlement.

Why was I able to fight back against a non-renewal? Just cause eviction is the answer! As with 80,000+ apartments throughout Maryland, my unit has a special federal tax break called the Low Income Housing Tax Credit. In return, the landlord (a private, for-profit company) was required to put a "just cause" provision in my lease saying that they couldn't refuse to renew my lease for any discriminatory or arbitrary reason. My landlord knew that the housekeeping complaint was bogus and that they couldn't prove it in court, so they settled.

I work as an assistant property manager and make some money, but housing choices for me in today's market are scarce, so I am thankful that I can stay in my home and community. "Just cause" is what it sounds like -- "justice." It tells the landlord that although you can non-renew a lease for any good reason, don't try to make something up to hide your discriminatory, unfair practices. If "just cause" can work in 80,000+ privately-owned apartments throughout Maryland, it can work everywhere – and bring a little more fairness and stability to families and neighborhoods. I urge you to vote Favorable on SB 644 to let counties and Baltimore City pass just cause eviction laws.