

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
SB 644 - Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover
Tenancies - Local Just Cause Termination Provisions

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 16, 2023



Health Care for the Homeless supports SB 644, which would enable local jurisdictions to establish “just cause” or “good cause” limitations on lease non-renewals. This bill expressly grants authority to local legislatures to decide when it is appropriate for rental agreements to be non-renewed. That means local policymakers would be able to determine the kind of “just cause” policy their locality needs, whether by type of building, for certain populations, or under certain circumstances such as a state of emergency. Without SB 644, local efforts are stymied by legal concerns around preemption.

In Maryland, a landlord can decide to non-renew without any stated cause. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They are under constant pressure to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities.

We know that there is a plethora of health risks associated with the disruptive displacement caused by eviction. Following an eviction, a person’s likelihood of experiencing homelessness significantly increases. Homelessness historically creates new health problems and exacerbates existing ones. Where you or I could easily manage something like diabetes or hypertension in the year 2022, even HIV, the disruptive displacement following an eviction makes caring for these things exponentially harder and sometimes impossible.

We know that mortality among those experiencing homelessness has escalated over the last 5-10 years. Every year, Health Care for the Homeless gathers for our Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day in which we remember the lives of hundreds of people with the experience of homelessness who died that year. There is no amount of health care that can substitute stable housing.

SB 644 recognizes that local legislatures want to aid their renters in achieving stable housing so that they are able contribute long-term to the workforce and the local economy. Requiring just cause as a precondition for an eviction can be a tailored policy that boosts the stability of the housing market by stabilizing families, neighborhoods, and communities. SB 644 ensures local legislatures can pass enforceable laws whereby no one is arbitrarily deprived of their housing.

For the health and safety of the clients we serve and for all Marylanders, Health Care for the Homeless urges a favorable report on SB 644.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland’s leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.

Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.