

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland and Renters United. I am a resident of 12A. **I am testifying in support of SB644.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

SB644 allows local jurisdictions to require a just basis for landlords to either refuse to renew or to cut off month-to-month/week-to-week leases. This legislation would enable local legislatures to pass their own laws, if they choose, limiting how and when lease non-renewals occur, requiring landlords to have a just cause to non-renew, or requiring landlords to prove a just cause in court.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as the rate of non-payment eviction was slowed by court delays and emergency rental assistance, lease-non-renewal evictions roughly doubled. This means that working people and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They have no choice but to accept declining conditions and increasing rents just to stay in their communities. A 2019 study from Princeton & the Eviction Lab found “just cause eviction ordinances have a significant and noticeable effect on eviction and eviction filing rates. Given the budget limitations of many states and municipalities to fund other solutions to the eviction crisis, passage of just cause eviction ordinances appears to be a relatively low-cost, effective policy solution.”¹ Without this bill, jurisdictions like Montgomery County and Baltimore City face preemption challenges to trying just cause eviction policies. It recognizes that local legislatures know how best to help their renters stay stably housed, contributing to their community.

This issue goes beyond economics to long-standing racial inequities in housing policy. Our partners at CASA recently reported that on November 22, 2023, seven residents of the Evergreen Terrace Apartments in Hyattsville, MD publicly denounced evictions that they believed were unjust, based on false evidence targeting immigrant and working class families.² In October 2023, the National Equity Atlas reported an estimated 98,000 households were behind on their rent in Maryland.³ Of those, 79% of tenants are people of color, including Blacks, Latinx, and Native Americans. Crucially, 47% of those households include children, a disproportionate number of whom are Black and Brown, and social scientists have documented declining school performance, increased drop-out rates, higher rates of adolescent violence, and worse health outcomes as negative outcomes among children who experienced eviction.⁴ People of color form less than half of this state's population, and helping them remain in their homes ensures we stop perpetuating racial inequities, especially lifelong detriments suffered by children.

My partner and I are the landlords of a single property in Howard County, and that makes me a boogeyman. Last year when I testified, I heard large landlords send up the cry, "Think of the Mom & Pop landlords!"

I do not wish to be the boogeyman for this policy. Once in our 7 years, my partner and I made the tough decision to file an eviction. Had a just cause law been in place, we wouldn't have gotten stuck with forever tenants. We could have given a good reason. But no reason was needed, even though eviction impacts a tenant's housing, employment, and even their health for years. That didn't sit right with me. And it doesn't sit right that large landlords and their lobbyists will claim you have to protect me by keeping just cause eviction off the table for every jurisdiction in the state.

Those who summon the boogeyman have their reasons. In 2022, a study in the University of North Carolina journal "Social Forces"⁵ covering over 4 million property records around Boston found something pertinent. Large landlords filed 2-3 times as many evictions as small ones like me. They also filed when they were owed less money and even as a strategy to collect rent.

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

² <https://wearecasa.org/tenants-at-evergreen-terrace-apartments-call-out-discriminatory-and-unjust-evict/>

³ <https://nationalequityatlas.org/rent-debt>

⁴ https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mdesmond/files/desmondkimbro.evictions.fallout.sf2015_2.pdf

⁵ <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soab063>

Small landlords, meanwhile, maintain closer relationships with tenants. We know eviction is and should be a last resort. We already make sure we have a solid reason before we file, so asking us to put that to paper is not the strenuous request our larger colleagues claim.

I have more faith in my fellow landlords than they have in me. I believe they can run their businesses while providing reasons for any evictions they must file. Our contracts already comply with laws protecting our interests and keeping tenants safe. Why not allow local jurisdictions to consider how to help tenants and communities thrive with just cause statutes?

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB644**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Palmisano

5580 Vantage Point Rd, Apt 5, Columbia, MD

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