



Testimony to the Judicial Proceedings Committee

SB162 - Landlord and Tenant - Termination of Residential Lease - Limitation of Liability for Rent

Position: Favorable

1/29/2024

The Honorable Senator Smith, Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Zoe Gallagher and I am a Policy Associate at Economic Action Maryland. Economic Action Maryland (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) is a people-centered movement to expand economic rights, housing justice, and community reinvestment for working families, low-income communities, and communities of color. Economic Action Maryland provides direct assistance today while passing legislation and regulations to create systemic change in the future.

As representative of an organization that works closely with tenant advocacy, I am writing to urge a favorable report on SB162.

SB162 limits a tenant's liability for rent under a residential lease in cases where the tenant, diagnosed with certain intellectual or developmental disabilities or mental disorders, vacates the leased premises. This legislation represents a significant step towards ensuring fairness and compassion in our housing policies.

SB162 recognizes the unique challenges faced by individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities and mental disorders, acknowledging that their ability to maintain a stable living situation may be substantially hindered by their conditions. By providing a clear and reasonable process for tenants in such circumstances to limit their liability for rent, this bill ensures that members of these vulnerable groups are able to leave housing that does not meet their needs. The pandemic only exacerbated a mental health crisis that was already occurring, and in 2023, [27.3%](#) of adults in Maryland reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder. This session is crucial for enacting legislation related to mental health outcomes.

The bill sets a reasonable limit on the tenant's liability for rent, capping it at 2 months' rent after vacating the leased premises. This limitation strikes a fair balance between the interests of landlords and tenants, recognizing the financial obligations of both parties while providing necessary protection for individuals facing medical challenges. To require an individual whose mental illness is specifically worsened by their living environment to be liable for an entire year's worth of rent is cruel and puts a heavy financial burden on someone who is already in need of support.

For these reasons I urge a favorable report. Let's contribute to creating a more compassionate and equitable housing environment for all residents of our state.



Sincerely,
Zoe Gallagher, Policy Associate