



Albert Turner
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409
turnera@publicjustice.org

HB392: Evidence – Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance – Fair Housing Testing

Hearing before the House Judicial Proceedings Committee on February 7, 2024

Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that stands with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing and their rights to fair and equal treatment by Maryland's landlord-tenant laws, courts, and agencies. The PJC actively works towards instigating systemic changes to establish a society founded on justice. Our focus is on utilizing legal avenues to remove barriers that impede economic and racial equity, through our various projects. PJC seeks the Committee's Favorable report on HB 392 as this allows tenants easier access to safe and stable housing and also promotes racial equity.

HB 392, which seeks to authorize fair housing testers to legally intercept communications under specific conditions, is much needed legislation that would allow Maryland to enforce our fair housing laws. Maryland has robust fair housing laws that were passed to hold landlords accountable for unfair and illegal practices. This bill would allow the state to actually enforce these laws.

The Public Justice Center's Executive Director, Jeniece Jones, has had robust experience and submits to this committee her personal expertise on fair housing testing. Prior to her Executive Director position with PJC, Jeniece Jones was the former Executive Director of Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio. Her seven years of experience at HOME is highlighted by the indispensable role of fair housing testing in unearthing and documenting hard to detect discriminatory practices in housing. In Ohio, fair housing testers are allowed to intercept communications during housing transactions.

By authorizing fair housing testers to lawfully intercept communications, HB 392 would offer a vital instrument for identifying and confronting covert discrimination that restricts access to safe, affordable, and quality housing in Maryland. Furthermore, this legislation incentivizes property managers to place greater emphasis on fair housing training, ensuring their staff are well-versed in legal compliance and best practices. This proactive approach in management fosters a more informed and equitable housing market, directly contributing to enhanced housing stability and the economic growth of Maryland families. Access to stable housing is a cornerstone for the well-being and economic advancement of families, and this bill could play a critical role in ensuring such access.

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

The essence of HB 392 is in alignment with the objectives of the PJC. It provides a substantial legal framework to reinforce our endeavors in ensuring fair housing practices. This bill passage would be key to ensure fairness and equality in housing, which is central to the PJC's mission of promoting economic and racial justice.

Public Justice Center **supports HB 392** as it would take essential steps to protect renters' privacy, allow easier access to safe and stable housing, and promote racial justice.

Public Justice Center is a member of the Renters United Maryland coalition and asks that the Committee issue a **FAVORABLE report on HB 392**. If you have any questions, please contact Albert Turner, Esq., turnera@publicjustice.org (410) 625-9409 Ext. 250.