



JUSTICE FOR ALL

MARYLAND HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY OF MARYLAND VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE
IN SUPPORT OF HB 0451: TAX ASSISTANCE FOR LOW-INCOME
MARYLANDERS - FUNDING
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2024

Susan Francis
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alexandria K. Montanio
PRESIDENT

David G. Sommer
VICE PRESIDENT

Penny J. Minna
TREASURER

James Tansey
SECRETARY

Tyree Ayers
Shereefat O. Balogun
Brent A. Bolea
Jhonell Campbell
Richard L. Costella
Susan DuMont
Brian Gordon
La'Tika Howard
Dr. Ann Irvine
Lydia E. Lawless
Robin Leone
Reba Letsa
Saad Malik
Anthony May
Michelle McGeogh
Chelsea Ortega
Marc E. Shach
Syma Ahmad Siddiqui
Sheila J. Stewart
D'Sean Williams-Brown
Emily J. Wilson

Chairwoman Atterbeary and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 451.

My name is John Hardt and I am the Director of the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) at the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS). MVLS is the oldest and largest provider of pro bono civil legal services to low-income Marylanders. Since MVLS' founding in 1981, our statewide panel of over 1,700 volunteer lawyers has provided free legal services to over 100,000 Marylanders in a wide range of civil legal matters. In FY23, MVLS volunteer and staff lawyers provided legal services to 3,256 people across the state. Through our LITC program, we encounter many clients who owe back taxes to the state of Maryland, resulting in consequences such as liens, levies, holds on driver's licenses, professional licenses, and vehicle registration. For the reasons explained below, MVLS respectfully requests the committee return a favorable report on HB0451.

There are three federally funded LITC programs in the state of Maryland: MVLS LITC, the University of Baltimore School of Law LITC and the University of Maryland Carey School of Law LITC. LITCs are federally funded to provide assistance to low-income taxpayers with federal tax issues. These clinics are allowed to assist low-income taxpayers with Maryland tax issues, but only if a federal tax issue already exists. For taxpayers with only a Maryland Tax issue, these LITCs cannot use their federal funding. Even without state funding for the LITCs, MVLS made the financially difficult decision to provide service to taxpayers with only Maryland tax issues, but this was unsustainable. Only the introduction of Maryland state funding three years ago allowed MVLS to continue. HB0451 increases the vital funding all three LITC programs need to provide legal representation for assistance with Maryland tax matters.