



HB 54
PROPERTY TAX – TRANSFER TO HEIR – PAYMENT PLANS
HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
February 6, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (“PBRC”), an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the statewide thought leader and clearinghouse for pro bono civil legal services in Maryland. PBRC provides training, mentorship, and pro bono service opportunities to members of the private bar and offers direct legal services through free legal clinics to over 6,200 clients annually. **PBRC supports HB 54 because vulnerable surviving family members of homeowners who are under economic strain need relief from a large lump-sum tax payment to help prevent the loss of their homes.**

Over the past nine years, PBRC has assisted nearly 800 homeowners at risk of losing their homes to tax sale. For homeowners, ending up on the tax sale list is usually the result of the inability to pay one’s property taxes. The clients served by our tax sale prevention clinics held in Baltimore in 2023 represented some of our state’s most vulnerable citizens: 60% were seniors, 30% were disabled, 72% identify as Black, and 78% reported annual household incomes of less than \$30,000. Through the advocacy of volunteer attorneys, many of these clients can access programs and credits that reduce their property tax burden allowing them to stay in their homes. However, most Maryland homeowners are unrepresented.

When homeowners pass away, the heirs to their home must pre-pay the home’s tax bill to properly obtain title to the home. The prepayment requirement may force an unexpected and large expense on the family, and it precludes certain heirs who would be eligible for the Homeowners’ Property Tax Credit from receiving the discount prior to paying the full bill. The full property tax bill, currently required to be paid in a single lump sum, is simply out of reach for many low-income surviving families and so they are unable to get the deed in their names. This “tangled title” problem frequently lands families in tax sale. By allowing surviving family members of homeowners an exemption from the prepayment requirement if they enroll in a payment plan, these heir homeowners will be better positioned to obtain title, avoid tax sale foreclosure, and keep their homes and the equity their families have worked to build.

PBRC supports HB 54, which may protect certain Marylanders from the loss of their family home to tax sale foreclosure, thereby preserving homeownership and the transfer of intergenerational wealth while stabilizing neighborhoods. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

For the above reasons,

PBRC urges a FAVORABLE report on HB 54.

Please contact Allison Harris, Director of PBRC’s Home Preservation Project, with any questions.

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