



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

---

## **HB0777: Baltimore City - Unpaid Water and Sewer Charges - Tax Sales of Non-Owner-Occupied Residential Property**

**Hearing before the House Ways and Means on February 20, 2024**

### **Position: Unfavorable**

---

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. The PJC assists over 800 renters and their families each year and has expertise in the field of landlord-tenant cases. **While we appreciate the underlying intent of HB 777, we must ask for an unfavorable report.**

House Bill 777 would give Baltimore City the ability to enforce a lien on a non-owner occupied residential property for unpaid water and sewer service that is less than \$350 if the property is being sold to enforce another lien. While we understand the intent of the bill as there are many individuals who sit on properties in Baltimore for years without paying taxes or water bills, and do not fix the conditions of these properties as they fall further and further into disrepair, we are fearful that this bill would negatively impact tenants and others. **We are in favor of an amendment that would limit the enforcement of this bill to apply only to properties that have vacancy notices issued by Baltimore City.**

As currently constructed, HB777 impacts many properties beyond just vacant homes. With the goal of protecting residents and moving vacant properties to productive use it is important to amend the bill. **We join our colleagues at Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore calling for an amendment that will limit the inclusion of water bills to only properties that meet the state definition to be eligible for *in rem* tax sale.** This accomplishes the goal of moving vacant and abandoned properties to productive use without hurting residents of Baltimore City. With the amendment we are supportive of the bill. If the amendment is not adopted we strongly oppose the legislation as drafted due to the impact on vulnerable residents of Baltimore.

Public Justice Center asks that the Committee amend the bill to remove the renter's insurance requirement on page two or significantly amend this requirement to address the concerns raised above. If you have any questions, please contact Albert Turner, Esq., turnera@publicjustice.org (410) 625-9409 Ext. 250.

*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.*