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Health and Government Operations
Committee

Chair

Health Occupations and
Long-Term Care Subcommittee

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Joint Committee on Administrative,
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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I Rosenberg

Before the Appropriations Committee

In Support of

House Bill 103

Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Termination and Special Fund

Chair Barnes and esteemed members of the Appropriation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 103, which will provide permanent funding for the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) Special Fund and ensure that Maryland remains a leader in housing stability and justice.

The Access to Counsel in Evictions Program has been a lifeline for Maryland renters, providing critical legal representation to thousands of low-income individuals facing eviction. Without legal counsel, tenants often navigate an imbalanced system where 96% of landlords have representation while only 1% of tenants do. This bill ensures that low-income renters continue to receive the legal support they need by making permanent the annual \$14 million allocation from Maryland's Abandoned Property Fund to the ACE Special Fund.

The impact of the ACE Program is undeniable. In FY 2024 alone, ACE attorneys closed over 9,100 cases, benefiting more than 21,000 Marylanders, including 9,100 children. 88% of tenants who wished to remain in their homes were able to do so because of legal representation.

Moreover, an independent analysis has shown that for every \$1 invested in ACE, the state realizes a \$3 return, saving Maryland approximately \$46.7 million in reduced shelter costs, lower public health expenditures, and improved housing stability.

The need for this funding is clear. Evictions disproportionately impact Black women, single mothers, individuals with disabilities, and survivors of domestic violence, exacerbating economic and racial disparities. Without legal representation, tenants are far more likely to face wrongful evictions or displacement that disrupts jobs, education, and health outcomes. At a time when Maryland courts see over 30,000 eviction filings per month, sustained investment in the ACE Program is a fiscally responsible and morally necessary commitment to fairness in our legal system.

By passing HB 103, we secure a long-term solution to prevent disruptive displacement and remove the sunset provision that threatens ACE's continued success. This bill also dissolves the now-unnecessary Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force, allowing funding to be directed where it is needed most—toward legal services for Maryland's most vulnerable renters. In 2015, I introduced legislation mandating an annual appropriation of \$1 million for legal counsel in contested custody and visitation proceedings. It did not pass.

However, in the pandemic session of 2021, Speaker Adrienne Jones supported legislation that provided funding for legal counsel in eviction cases.

House Bill 103 would make permanent the funding source for legal representation and the benefits it has provided for renters.

For these reasons, I urge a **favorable report** on House Bill 103. Thank you for your time and consideration.