



February 7, 2025

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 103 Access to Counsel in Evictions- Task Force Termination and Special Fund

On behalf of my organization, the National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel (NCCRC), I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 103, which would provide a stable baseline of \$14 million per year toward the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program (ACE). The NCCRC has been involved in [all twenty-five successful eviction right to counsel bills to date](#), and we are currently supporting efforts in over 100 jurisdictions around the country.

By being among the very first few states to enact a statewide right to counsel (RTC), Maryland established itself as a leader in the nationwide movement to protect the basic human needs of tenants facing eviction. The importance of this program cannot be overstated, as evictions cause devastating consequences for families- including homelessness, physical and mental health crises, and long-term economic instability. Yet, many tenants are unable to navigate the eviction process and reach an outcome that maintains their home or allows them time to move without the help of an attorney. Because Maryland's ACE program has been highly effective in combatting the inequities in the eviction process, and because Maryland ACE leaders have generously shared their knowledge and experience with people around the country, ACE has served as a model for advocates and policymakers in other states who are considering enactment of a similar right.

But such a right is only meaningful when backed up by funding to effectuate the right. By enacting HB 103, Maryland can showcase how to establish substantial, permanent funding in order to ensure that tenants actually receive the benefit of this new right. HB 103's removal of the sunset on the \$14 million ACE receives is supported by the [report](#) issued by the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force, which states "Making this \$14 million source of funding from the state's abandoned property fund a permanent source of revenue for the Program is critical to the ACE law and Program's success."

Data emerging from the RTC programs is providing stunning proof that systemic representation of tenants is succeeding on a variety of levels and fully justifying the funding that is being invested:

- In New York City, 84% of tenants are remaining in their homes, and shortly after the enactment of RTC both the default rate and eviction filing rate dropped by roughly 30%.
- In [San Francisco](#), 92% of tenants assisted by the RTC program avoided homelessness, and 63% of those receiving full representation were able to stay in their homes.

- In [Boulder](#), only 4% of represented tenants received an eviction on their record, compared to 42% of unrepresented tenants. 59% of represented tenants ended their case being able to stay in their unit, the case being dismissed, or the tenant given a reasonable amount of time to relocate.
- In [Toledo](#), the Toledo Blade [reported](#) “Of the 139 cases closed so far, nearly 88 percent, or 122, of those cases were successful in avoiding eviction. As a result, 177 adults and 190 children were able to stay in their homes.”
- In [Kansas City](#), after the right to counsel program was launched the eviction rate dropped from 99% to less than 20% in the first three months.

In addition to these amazing results for tenants, [studies have repeatedly found](#) that an eviction right to counsel projects to save cities and states far more than it costs. These results are also true in Maryland, where the task force found that the ACE program led to \$46.7 million in benefits and fiscal impact toward the state. In other words, for every \$1 spent on ACE, Maryland saw a benefit of \$3.04.

A pair of recently released studies relating to health and safety demonstrate the necessity of tenant right to counsel and the peril of not providing it. The [first study](#) found that New York City’s RTC program led to a reduction in adverse birth outcomes among Medicaid-insured birthing parents. On the flip side, a [study](#) found that renters nationwide are three times as likely to be subjected to violence as homeowners, and “The disparity persists across income levels, racial and ethnic groups, and age.” This statistic may be explained in part by the fact that only 4% of tenants on average nationwide gain access to representation absent a RTC.

Providing permanent funding for Maryland’s eviction right to counsel will have a massive impact: thousands of Maryland families stand to avoid disruptive displacement through the provision of counsel. Moreover, keeping the ACE program funded and healthy is critical, as Maryland is a leader and model for other jurisdictions across the country that seek to implement similar programs.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have, as we have done for policymakers in many other jurisdictions. Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.

Sincerely,

Andrew Ashbrook
NCCRC