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Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Friday, February 7, 2025

HB0103 – Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Termination and Special Fund

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Ronnie L. Taylor, and I serve as the Community Advocacy Manager at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing legal and systemic inequities affecting Maryland's LGBTQIA+ community. I write in strong support of **HB0103**, which seeks to make permanent funding for the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) Special Fund and terminate the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force.

HB0103 addresses the critical issue of housing instability among marginalized communities in Maryland. The bill ensures continuous funding for legal representation in eviction proceedings, a service that is vital for low-income tenants who are often unable to afford legal counsel. This is particularly significant for LGBTQIA+ individuals, who face higher rates of housing discrimination and instability. According to the Human Rights Campaign, LGBTQ+ people experience homelessness at higher rates than their cisgender and straight peers.

The provisions of **HB0103** are designed to provide sustained support for tenants facing eviction:

1. **Permanent Funding:** By mandating an annual distribution of \$14 million from the State's Unclaimed Property Fund to the ACE Special Fund, the bill ensures that resources are consistently available for legal representation in eviction cases. This funding is crucial for organizations like the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) to continue their work in preventing unjust evictions.

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2. **Termination of the Task Force:** The bill proposes ending the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force, recognizing that its objectives have been met and that resources can be better utilized in direct services to tenants.

Legal representation has a proven impact on eviction outcomes. Research indicates that tenants with legal counsel are significantly less likely to face eviction judgments. A study from Princeton University found that tenants with lawyers were considerably less likely to be subject to possessory judgments and eviction warrants.

In my role at FreeState Justice, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in securing stable housing. Discrimination and systemic barriers often lead to higher rates of eviction within this community. Ensuring access to legal representation is a critical step toward addressing these disparities and promoting housing stability for all Marylanders.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0103**. This legislation not only secures essential funding for legal representation in eviction proceedings but also reinforces Maryland's commitment to equity and justice for its most vulnerable residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,



Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. [HRC | Foreclosure and Eviction Among LGBTQ+ Adults](#)
2. [The Effects of Legal Representation on Tenant Outcomes in Housing Court: Evidence from New York City's Universal Access Program - Princeton University - Department of Economics](#)