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Richard Keith Kaplowitz

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**TESTIMONY ON HB#/0103 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

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

**TO:** Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the Appropriations Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0103, Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Termination and Special Fund**

In 2021, Maryland’s General Assembly created the Access to Counsel in Evictions Program, through which **eligible tenants** in Maryland are **provided access to legal representation** in eviction and subsidy termination cases.

A landlord cannot evict a renter in Maryland without getting a court order and scheduling the eviction through the Sheriff’s Department or, in Baltimore County, the Constable’s Office. Renters have the right to defend themselves against an eviction or subsidy termination. There are many defenses that renters can raise to try to stop an eviction, but every case is different. <sup>1</sup>

Ancient Jewish texts are full of laws about keeping homes safe for the people who live in them. The prophet Micah understood that housing is more than a roof over one’s head and that to deny a person safe housing is not only robbing them in the present but also robbing their family for generations to come. The negative impacts of evictions are far reaching for individuals, families, and whole communities. Micah 2:1-2: “Woe to those who plot iniquity and work evil in their beds; when the morning becomes light they perform it, for their hand has the power. They covet fields and seize them; they take over houses as well, doing violence to both owner and house, to people and their inherited land.”

It pays for the state to prevent homelessness, according to a new report on Maryland’s program that offers lawyers to renters facing eviction.

Maryland’s Access to Counsel in Evictions program, created in 2021, served about 21,000 residents, including 9,100 children, in fiscal year 2024, [the state-commissioned report, published this month by Stout Risius Ross](#), states. It prevented thousands of evictions and won renters time to secure new housing. About three-quarters of the renters represented by

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<sup>1</sup> [https://legalhelpmd.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-ACE-Brochure\\_11.24-1.pdf](https://legalhelpmd.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-ACE-Brochure_11.24-1.pdf)

the ACE program were able to stay in their home. Of the 87% of renters who wanted to stay in their home, 88% were able to do so.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund is maintained and changed from a Task Force to a fund that the Maryland Legal Services Corporation manages to provide those services. It will direct making permanent distributions by the Comptroller from funds gained from abandoned property in the State to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund. This will be effected by terminating the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force on January 31, 2026 and making permanent an annual \$14,000,000 appropriation by the Governor from the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0103**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://thedailyrecord.com/2025/01/24/renters-avoid-evictions-when-they-have-a-lawyer-md-report-states/#:~:text=Maryland's%20Access%20to%20Counsel%20in%20Evictions%20program%2C%20created%20in%202021,time%20to%20secure%20new%20housing.>