

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
Submitted by Judith Poey
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House Bill 103
Hearing: February 11, 2025
House Appropriations Committee

POSITION: Favorable

I am Judith Poey, Associate Vice President and Health Program Officer at United Way of Central Maryland (UWCM). UWCM strongly supports a favorable outcome of HB103.

211 at United Way of Central Maryland (211 at UWCM) connects central Maryland residents in need of housing, food, utility, and other types of assistance with much needed resources. In FY24, we responded to over 115,000 calls for help in central Maryland alone. 211 is an easy to remember number that has been a lifesaver to many families.

In 2022, 211 at UWCM partnered with Civil Justice to design and build a telephonic and web-based intake system to connect eligible Maryland residents facing eviction with the free legal counsel afforded to them through the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) Program. The ACE coordinated intake system (ACE-CIS), which centralizes hundreds of different entry points across the state into one, is operated out of 211 at UWCM and makes it easier for Maryland tenants to get connected to legal assistance. The system was piloted in Baltimore City in May 2023 and expanded to serve the entire state of Maryland in May 2024. In FY24, ACE-CIS completed 2,007 applications and from July-December 2024 ACE-CIS completed 3,675 applications from Maryland residents facing eviction. We also referred over 3,000 applicants to other needed resources, such as food or utility assistance.

Maryland families are feeling the pain of a 26% increase in food prices since 2020, plus a 12.5% increase in their utility bills since January with another increase expected in June. This will increase the cost of doing business and result in an increase in the cost of purchasing goods and services, like quality childcare. This is especially true of asset limited income constrained employed (ALICE) families. Many families are one catastrophic event away from being homeless. ALICE families are already struggling to make ends meet and the compounded increase in food, utilities, and a decrease in purchasing power could drive many hard-working families to face the unthinkable—eviction. The ACE program offers drowning ALICE families facing eviction a lifeline in the midst of this crisis, not only stabilizing them, but the neighborhoods in which they live.

In a time fraught with uncertainty, HB103 can be an anchor to families across Maryland by securing permanent funding for the ACE program. Please support HB103 and ensure that this invaluable program continues to be available to the hardworking residents of Maryland. This is not just a program, it is a lifeline for many families, and they deserve our support.