

Ben Barnes, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates

RE: House Bill 103: Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Determination and Special Fund – Favorable

Dear Chairperson Barnes:

I am a third-year law student at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, and I am writing in support of House Bill 103. Last year, I had the opportunity to work as a student attorney with the law school's clinical program in the Eviction Prevention Clinic. This clinic, funded by Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) funds, has a profound impact on the lives of Baltimore City community members as well as on the lives of law students like me.

Over the course of the fall and spring semesters, the clinic provided me with both litigation and advocacy opportunities. With my clinic partner, I represented tenants at risk of eviction, which involved drafting letters and settlement agreements, counseling clients, communicating with landlords' attorneys and property managers, and arguing in front of judges in the District Court of Maryland for Baltimore City. We also conducted Know Your Rights presentations and connected with other community partners who are working to address the housing crisis in Maryland. By the end of the year, my clinic partner and I worked with nearly 20 clients. Perhaps more importantly, I was able to invest in and learn from my community. My clients confided in me, trusted me, welcomed me into their homes they were trying to keep—only a few miles away from the building in which I am privileged enough to earn an advanced degree.

Through this experience, I also learned firsthand of the importance of legal representation. Every week, I saw how tenants' outcomes were improved when they had an ACE attorney; alternatively, I also observed tenants who potentially could have avoided, or at least delayed, an adverse judgment if they had just had a lawyer.

Through the ACE program, the Eviction Prevention Clinic plays an important role in both the Baltimore City community and in the lives of law students. This important work is not possible without ACE funding. I am a better student and community member because of my time with the clinic, and it solidified my desire to work as a public interest attorney.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my support of this piece of legislation. I urge this committee to vote favorably on HB 103.

Respectfully,

Carolyn Wetzel

This testimony is submitted on my own behalf and refers to my experience in the Eviction Prevention Clinic at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law and is not on behalf of and does not represent the opinions of the School of Law, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, or the University of Maryland System.