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

Dear Committee Chair Del. Ben Barnes, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

United Workers is a poor people's non-profit organization founded in 2002. We have hundreds of members across Maryland, many of whom have experienced homelessness and housing insecurity. Access to Counsel has been a lifeline to many of our members and to the thousands across the state, which is why it needs a permanent source of funding. With inflation impacting the housing market, rental units remain stubbornly high. Right now 50% of Marylanders pay more than 30% of their income on rents, putting many at risk of eviction.

Our members have struggled to overcome evictions even during the Federal moratorium on evictions during the pandemic. This included one member in Westminster, Maryland who required the use of a breathing machine to address a chronic medical condition. An eviction would have severely compromised her health and well-being. With the aid of legal counsel we were able to prevent this eviction by invoking the Federal moratorium.

Another member in Cumberland with the support of the Access to Counsel program was able to negotiate with her landlord so that she would finally get a working stove – six months after moving into her rental unit.

And in Baltimore members have contended with bed bug infestations, electrical hazards, mold and water damage.

We have done outreach to thousands across the state – in faith communities, neighborhoods, union member meetings, and public schools. The reaction to the Access to Counsel program has been extremely positive – there is widespread recognition of the great needs for renters to be able to have legal support.

United Workers is a Maryland-based, multiracial, poor people's human rights organization, helping to build a movement to end poverty for everyone, everywhere.

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For renters that wanted to stay in their homes, the Access to Counsel program proved to be an incredibly important support. 88% of renters because of the Access to Counsel program were able to stay in their homes when that was their preferred option. Over 14,000 renters benefited from this program directly - preventing evictions or providing needed time to transition to another rental unit. We call on this committee to vote in favor of HB 103 so that Maryland can continue to support this proven program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ashley Hufnagel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ashley Hufnagel

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