



**TESTIMONY FOR SB0154
ACCESS TO COUNSEL IN EVICTIONS – TASK FORCE TERMINATION AND SPECIAL
FUND**

Bill Sponsor: Senator Hettleman

Committee: Budget and Tax

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0154 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Homeownership for many Marylanders not only provides financial stability but it also conveys to children, allowing a family to hold a large asset over time. For those who own a home but struggle to make ends meet, foreclosure represents a staggering loss. Not just homelessness, but financial insecurity for the rest of their lives.

Maryland has created an Access to Counsel Fund to help those who cannot afford counsel during eviction proceedings access to legal representation. The concern, especially with the rise in evictions and budgetary constraints, is that this necessary program will lapse.

This bill, if enacted, would make a permanent requirement that the Comptroller distribute \$14M of the funds from the proceeds from the sale of abandoned property to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund. It also requires the Governor to make a distribution from the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to be used by qualifying residents in eviction proceedings.

This will ensure funding to a very important program that helps Marylanders who are struggling the most have a better chance to remain in their homes.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.