

SHELLY HETTLEMAN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Chair
Rules Committee

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Health and Human Services

Pensions



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 203
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3131 · 301-858-3131
800-492-7122 Ext. 3131
Shelly.Hettleman@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN

SB 154 - ACCESS TO COUNSEL IN EVICTIONS - TASK FORCE TERMINATION AND SPECIAL FUND

SB 154 represents a critical step in ensuring that Maryland continues its leadership in addressing housing inequities by making permanent the funding and structure for the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) Program. Specifically, SB 154 solidifies the annual \$14 million appropriation to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) from the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund, sourced from abandoned property funds, and sunsets the ACE Task Force on January 31, 2026, following the program's full implementation.

The ACE Program has already demonstrated its transformative impact. According to recent data, 88% of tenants who sought to remain in their homes were able to do so with the support of the program. In fiscal year 2024 alone, the ACE Program closed 8,894 cases—a 124% increase from the previous year—providing much-needed legal representation to thousands of Maryland residents. Without legal counsel, between 51-75% of tenants typically lose their cases, often resulting in eviction. In contrast, 84% of ACE clients achieved their case goals, highlighting the program's effectiveness in leveling the playing field in eviction proceedings.

This program is particularly important for Maryland's most vulnerable populations. About 73% of ACE clients identify as Black or African American, 72% are women, and 56% of female clients have at least one child in their household. Alarming, 39% of tenants reported that eviction would likely result in homelessness for their families. By addressing these disparities, the ACE Program ensures that our justice system works for all Marylanders, not just those with the resources to hire legal representation.

The economic benefits of the program further underscore its value. Analysis from Stout consultants estimates that for every \$1 spent on the ACE Program, Maryland realizes \$4 in economic benefits, including savings of \$21.6 million in social safety net costs and \$6.8 million in additional Medicaid spending. By preventing disruptive displacement, the program has helped over 5,600 households avoid eviction, preserving economic stability and employment for thousands of Marylanders.

SB 154 also reflects the importance of transitioning the ACE Program's oversight from the Task Force to permanent entities like the Maryland Legal Services Corporation and the Department of Housing and Community Development. These organizations are well-positioned to continue the program's success, ensuring streamlined operations and effective resource allocation without the need for redundant structures.

As evictions in Maryland return to pre-pandemic levels and housing costs continue to rise, the ACE Program provides a lifeline for tenants, especially those facing systemic barriers to housing stability. I urge a favorable report on SB 154 to guarantee the program's long-term sustainability and continued impact. We can solidify Maryland's commitment to justice, equity, and economic stability for all its residents.