



BILL NO: Senate Bill 154
TITLE: Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Termination and Special Fund
COMMITTEE: Budget and Taxation
HEARING DATE: January 15, 2025
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the COMMITTEE to favorably Report on SB154.**

Senate Bill 154 would make permanent the requirement for the Comptroller to distribute \$14,000,000 annually from abandoned property funds to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund (see § 8–909 of the Real Property Article). Senate Bill 154 would be beneficial for domestic violence survivors because it will help ensure access to legal representation in eviction proceedings. Survivors of domestic violence often face housing instability and may be at risk of eviction due to circumstances related to their abuse. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV): approximately 38% of all domestic violence victims become homeless at some point in their lives. Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Survivors often face barriers to securing safe and affordable housing, including discrimination, lack of financial resources, and the need for legal assistance. By providing legal counsel, the bill helps protect their rights and offers them a better chance to maintain stable housing, which is crucial for their safety and recovery. Legal representation for tenants will put them on a level playing field with landlords, many of which are large companies that have counsel for these cases.

Additionally, the bill terminates the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force on January 31, 2026, and outlines the administration and use of the fund by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC). MLSC has long managed funds of this nature and is the proper entity to manage the funding.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on SB154.**

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