

**SB154 Access to Counsel in Evictions –
Task Force Termination and Special Fund**

**HEARING BEFORE SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE
1/15/2025**

POSITION: SUPPORT

Shore Legal Access (formerly Mid-Shore Pro Bono) supports SB154. This bill would permanently fund Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE), therefore continue the crucial progress made towards reducing evictions and disruptive displacements impacting Maryland’s children and families. The success and efficacy of Maryland’s groundbreaking work to prevent eviction hinges on continuous and stable funding that would be achieved through SB154.

Shore Legal Access (SLA) connects people on the Eastern Shore with limited financial means to legal representation and essential community resources. Each year, SLA helps over 3,800 people in our community access the legal system when they would otherwise be shut out. Our small legal team and network of volunteer lawyers provide free legal services for eviction prevention, criminal record expungement, life and estate planning, family law, foreclosure, and consumer debt. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure homes for children.

SLA is a provider of ACE in 8 Eastern Shore counties (Caroline, Dorchester, Queen Anne’s, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester). Tenants on the Eastern Shore have embraced the opportunity to obtain legal representation through ACE since the program began. Since July 1, 2022, SLA’s staff and volunteers have represented over 1,660 Eastern Shore tenants with more favorable outcomes for tenants in nearly every case. These services collectively helped tenants reduce their financial burden by over \$368,000. When given the chance to have representation, tenants are taking advantage of that option, and as a result, getting better outcomes.



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SLA recently represented a grandmother who had been living in her apartment for over twenty-four years and was the primary caregiver for her young grandchild. She received a notice that her landlord was terminating her tenancy and would not renew her lease. With representation by a volunteer attorney, the client was able to significantly extend the amount of time she needed to seek alternative housing and was able to incorporate an allowance for her to leave the property at any time so that she would be able to take advantage of any housing opportunity that came up.

Another recent client was a young single man who had been dealing with a severe pest infestation in his recently rented apartment – his first time renting an apartment ever. The pest infestation persisted despite his requests to have the issue addressed by the landlord. SLA's attorney worked with the landlord to get the pest infestation addressed and obtained an agreement to abate the rent.

A Mid-Shore tenant came to Shore Legal Access in distress because her landlord had filed a failure to pay rent case against her, even though she had paid her rent on time. SLA's legal team conducted a thorough review of the landlord's ledger and discovered that the landlord actually owed the tenant a credit, not the over \$1,000 in nonpayment claimed in the filing. The landlord and the tenant came to an agreement and the case was dismissed.

These are just a few examples of the hundreds of tenants and their families that have benefitted from Access to Counsel in Evictions. Shore Legal Access' small legal team and modest network of volunteer attorneys provide representation with life-changing results for tenants in our community in 8 counties. Sustained, stable funding is essential to ensuring that we have the capacity necessary to implement ACE. For these reasons, SLA supports SB154 and urges the Committee's support on this bill. If you have any questions regarding our position on this bill, please contact Meredith Girard, Executive Director at 410.690.8128 or e-mail mgirard@shorelegal.org.