

DATE: February 25, 2025

BILL NO.: House Bill 1177

TITLE: Landlord and Tenant - Tenant Repair and Maintenance Complaint Hotline - Establishment

COMMITTEE: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Letter of Information

Description of Bill:

HB 1177 requires the Attorney General to establish a toll-free hotline to allow tenants to report anonymous complaints related to repairs and maintenance of residential real property, including residential property owned by the federal government, the state, or a local government. After the Office of the Attorney General receives a complaint, they can:

1. Refer tenants to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation or another legal services entity;
2. Report violations of local code to local code enforcement; or
3. Bring an action in an appropriate court to recover for injury or loss resulting from violations, and also to seek equitable relief for the tenant who made the initial complaint.

Background and Analysis:

In the 2024 session, DHCD passed HB 693, the Renters Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024. This bill established the Office of Tenant and Landlord Affairs (OTLA) within DHCD. The OTLA is required to:

1. Ensure that tenants have access to education resources to aid in understanding and exercising the tenants' rights under state law;
2. Provide tenants with information on how to report a violation of their legal rights as tenants and facilitate referrals of their legal rights as tenants and facilitate referrals of reported violations to appropriate enforcement agencies;
3. Provide tenants with information on how to obtain financial counseling; and
4. Notify appropriate authorities regarding housing discrimination and other unfair or illegal housing practices.

While HB 1177 would place the bill's duties on the Office of the Attorney General, the first two duties are potentially duplicative of what the OTLA is doing currently

- Both the OTLA and the OAG would now have authority to facilitate referrals to local code enforcement agencies; and
- They would also both be authorized to report violations of local code, whether through a "report" in HB 1177 or to "notify appropriate authorities regarding...unfair or illegal housing practices" for the OTLA.

Lastly, while not duplicative, the responsibility assigned to the OAG to "bring an action in an appropriate court" in response to tenant complaints is similar in scope to the informational role the OTLA provides tenants. While DHCD cannot bring an action to an appropriate court in the same way as the OAG, we do offer resources so that tenants understand their rights and can decide whether they want to pursue further legal action.