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HB 709 - Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Good Cause Termination Provisions

Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee, Feb. 18, 2025

Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

Public Justice Center (PJC) is part of Renters United Maryland and urges you to move favorable on HB 709. PJC is a nonprofit public interest law firm that assists over 800 renters and their families each year. We stand with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing.

Whether homeowner or renter – across race, class, and zip code – all Marylanders deserve the chance to put down roots in our communities. Yet, in FY24, landlords filed 5,104 “no cause” or “tenant holding over” eviction cases – a 62% increase from pre-COVID. HB 709 would address this by allowing local jurisdictions to pass Good Cause Eviction laws and prevent people from being evicted unless the landlord provides a legitimate reason.

It is important to emphasize that this is local enabling legislation *only* – untying the hands of counties so that they can pass good cause eviction legislation if they want to and give residents the opportunity to stay rooted in their communities if they are abiding by the lease. If a county chooses to pass good cause, they will then integrate the new law into alignment with other local policies to meet local needs. [Over 41 local elected officials](#) in Maryland want to be empowered to pass good cause eviction. 8 other states¹ – including Colorado and New York in the past year – and 23 counties and cities have passed good cause eviction. **Maryland is only one of 5 states that explicitly prohibits counties from passing good cause eviction.**

When corporate landlords engage in no-cause evictions, families cannot stay rooted in their schools, jobs, and support networks; and, renters do not report hazardous conditions out of fear of eviction. The whole neighborhood suffers.

¹ California, Colorado, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Washington (and D.C.)

Good cause requires transparency and accountability from corporate landlords for why they are choosing to evict a tenant. In our experience representing renters in eviction cases for over 30 years, some landlords will non-renew a lease out of a discriminatory motive, i.e., wanting to evict a family who has a voucher or discrimination based on family status (having children), race, disability, or sexual orientation. Tenants can also face eviction as retaliation if they try to organize and demand repairs to dangerous living conditions. **Proving discrimination or retaliation is almost impossible, especially in district court where tenants do not have access to discovery tools like requests for production of documents and depositions.**

For these reasons and more, the American Bar Association Supports “Just Cause” Eviction Policy. In 2022, the American Bar Association (ABA) endorsed “just cause eviction” policies as one of [“Ten Guidelines for Residential Eviction Laws.”](#) As reported in the ABA resolution:

When such good cause requirements are absent renters and their families lack basic security of tenure. Forcing a household to relocate imposes significant disruption and potential hardship on the tenant, and should not be allowed without a legitimate reason. Allowing eviction without cause invites abuse, enabling a discriminatory, retaliatory, or otherwise illegitimate motive for ending a tenancy to be easily concealed behind a “no cause” eviction.

American Bar Association, House of Delegates Resolution 612, 9-10.

Black families bear the brunt of these evictions. [1 in 4 Black children in renting households face the threat of eviction each year due to structural and systemic racism.](#)

HB 709 is targeted at large corporate landlords who have rigged the system for too long. **The bill explicitly exempts landlords who own 5 or fewer rental units in Maryland.**

[Up to 25% of households who are evicted become homeless.](#) **Accordingly, Good Cause Eviction is a no-cost way for Maryland to prevent more families from becoming homeless at a time in which the federal government is shredding the social safety net.**

Finally, academic researchers looking at other states that have passed good cause have [concluded that Good Cause Eviction legislation keeps families in homes without reducing housing supply.](#)

Public Justice Center is a member of Renters United Maryland, a statewide coalition of renters, organizers, and advocates, and **we urge a favorable report on HB 709.**