



Written Testimony on House Bill 0709

February 14, 2025

Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Taylor House Office Building
251 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and Committee members,

I am the Executive Director of Columbia Housing Center, a Howard County based nonprofit organization with a mission to champion and sustain thriving, integrated neighborhoods in and around Columbia, MD. We offer a variety of housing support programs serving low and moderate income households, including an affirmative marketing housing referral service that furthers fair housing, a rent subsidy program for students at Howard Community College, and a program to help voucher holders find homes in Howard County's competitive rental market.

In the past year, we have received about 550 requests from people seeking housing in Howard County. About 25% of these home seekers indicated that they have a previous eviction on file. Unfortunately, we have to turn most of these people away, because it is nearly impossible for people to get approved for rental housing in our area once they have been evicted. Any legislation that better regulates landlords helps prevent bad actors from using retaliatory tactics to remove tenants who complain about unsafe or unhygienic conditions, unfair treatment, or discrimination.

In our work with students, voucher holders, and home seekers, we have seen instances of leases not being renewed due to one or two late rent payments, even though those payments were ultimately made. We have heard from tenants whose leases were not renewed after they complained about pests or noise. Many of the people we serve are single mothers with young children who do not receive adequate (or any) child support. They are working and/or attending school so they can improve their situation and create a better life for their families. A notice to vacate or eviction can cause an inordinate amount of stress and completely upend their lives, as these parents hustle to find alternative housing. In many cases, because of their limited housing options and a short time frame, a move means that their children have to change schools, leaving their friends and beloved teachers behind.

The Columbia Housing Center supports HB709, which will enable counties to enact prohibitions on landlords from failing to renew a tenant's lease without good cause. Housing instability is an increasing problem across Maryland particularly for people with limited financial and other supporting resources that we serve every day. This a common sense law that would contribute to keeping people housed by holding landlords accountable for their treatment of tenants just as tenants are held accountable by their leases.

We hope that with the authorization of HB709, local jurisdictions—including Howard County—will take action to pass this common sense tenant protection that will put renters on a more equal legal footing with landlords.

Importantly, this bill provides both tenant and landlord protections. This law does not create a burden for landlords - they would simply be required to tell a tenant why they are being evicted, while being given multiple justifiable reasons to cite for that eviction. It will protect landlords from claims of unfair or arbitrary practices, because the requirement to provide the tenant with a reason for their eviction will necessarily show that the eviction is valid.

We are appreciative of the multiple sponsoring delegates, and of this Committee's consideration of this legislation that will enable and encourage local jurisdictions to provide a much needed tenant protection.

Columbia Housing Center requests that the Environment and Transportation Committee issue a favorable report on HB709.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jessamine Duvall', with a stylized, overlapping flourish at the end.

Jessamine Duvall
Executive Director
Columbia Housing Center