



In Favor

SB651/HB709

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MARYLAND MATTERS

All eyes turn to the Maryland Senate to pass good-cause eviction

By Matt Losak, January 20, 2025

Right now in Maryland, a landlord can evict a tenant who wants to continue to live in an apartment without cause or reason. With just 60 days' notice at the end of a lease term, the landlord does this by simply choosing not to renew the lease.

If a tenant stays one day longer, the landlord can file to evict the tenant for “Tenant Holding Over” (THO). Because the landlord is not required to provide any reason for the THO eviction, burden of defense rests entirely on the tenant. Without smoking gun evidence of landlord malfeasance, discrimination or retaliation – such as documents or witness testimony – it is nearly impossible for tenants to defend themselves, even when there are clear signs of illegal landlord practices.

The ability of landlords to, in effect, evict anyone at any time without justification has an enormous chilling effect on whole communities of renters who live in fear of arbitrary eviction. It gives irresponsible and abusive landlords and property managers power to abuse and silence tenants who press for services and maintenance, file complaints, form tenants associations or otherwise protest misconduct.

To correct this injustice, the House last year passed “Good-Cause” enabling legislation in a historic 96-37 vote. Good-cause, or “just-cause,” eviction protections require a landlord to give a reasonable justification for not renewing a lease.

The Renters Alliance has pursued good-cause protection for more than 15 years. The effort has steadily gained support from legal, labor, ethnic, political and religious organizations, the Maryland Association of Counties and leading elected officials. Gov. Wes Moore has said just-cause protections are “important,” and his Housing Secretary Jake Day promised full backing to get the bill passed.

Despite that support, the bill did not get a vote last year in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Chair Will Smith (D-Montgomery) has said he supports the bill, but told a group of desperate renters that he did not have the votes to guarantee committee passage – something many bill watchers disagreed with.

Maryland leads the nation in eviction filings, according to Princeton University’s Eviction Lab. And THO eviction filings are dramatically rising. Maryland’s Legal Aid Bureau said the more than 5,000 THO filings in 2023 represented more than a doubling of such filings since 2019. This represents a growing eviction strategy to circumvent due process with a streamlined court process that targets our most vulnerable residents, especially low-income, working families and seniors on fixed incomes.

THO threats intimidate renters from exercising their rights to stable, quality homes and to being treated with dignity and respect. What the data does not show is how many renters face THO eviction and leave prior to a court hearing they believe they cannot win.

In the past year, the Renters Alliance has dealt directly with scores of tenants threatened with THO eviction. Most are seniors who have become active in their communities. Soon after a senior renter and his wife complained repeatedly about garbage not being collected, they were told their lease would not be renewed, after 15 years.

A senior and a veteran, concerned about deteriorating building conditions and rude, abusive treatment by property staff, worked with us to form a tenants association. He got a notice to vacate and must soon leave his home. Another tenant leader received a notice to vacate or face a 30% rent increase. He was forced to move.

The Renters Alliance managed to save one senior couple when the new property manager admitted that she issued an eviction notice because the owners did not want to pay to exterminate bedbugs plaguing the building – easier to get rid of the tenants than the bugs.

We have fought many similar cases. In some, we've been able to stop or delay eviction, or reach a financial settlement. For others, we sought government enforcement. But in too many instances, authorities throw up their hands because the law allows a landlord to reclaim possession of a rental home without having to provide any justification.

As Maryland, and the nation, come to terms with the relationship of stable homes to community health, welfare and prosperity, enacting legal protections for renters is becoming a clear public policy priority.

The time has come to let local governments enact good-cause eviction protection and eliminate unjust housing instability. Our communities are demanding it, and all eyes are now on the Maryland Senate to make it happen.