



**Bill Title: HB 709 Landlord and Tenant Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local
Good Cause Termination (Good Cause Eviction)
Position: SUPPORT (FAV)
To: Environment and Transportation Committee
From: Chelsea Ortega, Attorney, on behalf of Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC**

Dear Chair Korman and members of the Environment & Transportation Committee,

My name is Chelsea Ortega with Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC, which is a part of Renters United Maryland. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 709 Landlord and Tenant Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Good Cause Termination (Good Cause Eviction).

Currently in Maryland, corporate landlords can evict a tenant for *no good reason* and as a result many Marylanders are facing severe housing instability. In our state, 5,000+ families are made homeless each year because of an eviction and more than 30,000 Marylanders experience homelessness each year. There is a dire need to curb evictions and keep Marylanders rooted in our communities.

HB 709 would allow local jurisdictions the ability to pass good cause laws which simply require transparency and accountability from corporate landlords for why they are choosing to evict a tenant. Again, this is local enabling legislation – not a state mandate – so that counties may pass good cause within the framework of their housing needs and master plan. Maryland is one of only five states that explicitly prohibits counties from passing Good Cause Eviction laws.

Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC is a private tenants' rights firm, representing tenants living in uninhabitable conditions, have been the subject of an illegal eviction, or debt collection violations. Our firm has represented many tenants who have been retaliated against by their landlords with non-renewal notices when they notify landlords about health, life and safety issues in their property or contact code enforcement. It is very difficult to prove in court that the reason for the non-renewal notices are retaliatory.

The current law in Maryland allows for landlords to remove tenants from their homes without needing to provide a reason. This creates fear and disempowers tenants from holding landlords and property managers accountable for fixing deplorable living conditions. HB 709

would allow renters to exercise their rights and engage with landlords, property managers, and government agencies without fear of retaliation or discrimination, i.e., to have some security in their homes, school system, and support network. HB 709 also has an exemption for small landlords, which keeps the focus on corporate landlord accountability.

Research shows that good cause eviction laws greatly decrease eviction filings meaning that fewer Marylanders would be at risk of being put out of their homes. This would mean fewer evictions for Black Maryland residents who – because of centuries of government-sponsored housing discrimination – are disproportionately impacted by evictions. 1 in 4 Black children in renting households face the threat of eviction each year due to structural and systemic racism. The research is also clear that Good Cause Eviction has [no impact on new housing development](#).

As Maryland's budget deficit looms, passing enabling legislation for local Good Cause Eviction laws would save the state money on support programs and provide a no-cost way to prevent homelessness, strengthen our communities, and hold corporate landlords to account.

Eight states – California, Colorado, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Washington – as well as D.C., have passed Good Cause Eviction legislation, as have over 23 localities.

For these reasons, Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC urges a favorable report on HB 709.