



C. Matthew Hill
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409
hillm@publicjustice.org

HB 716: Housing and Community Development – Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program Eligibility – Alterations
Hearing of the House Environment & Transportation Committee on February 18, 2025

Position: Favorable With Amendments

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that stands with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing and their rights to fair and equal treatment by Maryland courts and agencies. The PJC advocates for systemic change to build a just society. **PJC supports HB 716 with one amendment.**

Maryland's statewide voucher program is an important component of the state's strategy to ensure that all residents have access to affordable housing. Vouchers that parallel the federal Housing Choice Voucher program ensure that tenants pay no more than 30% of their income toward the rent in most cases. This program is a lifeline for families in need of assistance. Currently [almost 50% of Maryland renters are housing cost burdened – including 25% of renters who pay over half of their income toward rent](#). When these extremely rent-burdened families experience any disruption in income, they quickly face an eviction action and a potential spiral into poverty and homelessness. For this reason, it is no surprise that [evictions throughout the state are rising back to pre-pandemic levels \(21,284 in FY 24\)](#). We know that between 15-25% of individuals who are evicted become homeless. This has enormous costs for the individual, the community, and the state. Preventing eviction saves the state money by reducing homelessness and state-funded safety net costs related to shelter, educating students experiencing homelessness, health care, institutionalization of people with disabilities, foster care, decreased incarceration, and the economic impacts of increased employment and income stability.

Accordingly, the state's voucher program ensures that recipients – many of whom are elderly or disabled – receive the housing assistance they require to maintain safe, stable homes.

HB 716 with the amendment described below, will better align Maryland's voucher program with the federal program and ensure that more Public Housing Agencies in the state participate in the program so that more residents can obtain this critical lifeline.

We support the amendment below to better align the state's voucher program with the federal program by clarifying that, normally, the tenant's portion of the rent should not exceed 30% of their income, see 24 C.F.R. § 5.628, except in certain cases allowed by federal law. For example, under 24 CFR 982.508, the tenant may be required to pay up to 40% of their income toward the rent, but *only* when the total

rent for the property exceeds the “payment standard” (the maximum that the Public Housing Agency will normally pay) set by the Public Housing Agency. In other words, the vast majority of renters with a federal Housing Choice Voucher pay 30% of their income toward the rent, with a small exception for 40% of their income toward the rent under certain circumstances. The amendment proposed below will bring Maryland into alignment with the federal program. We understand that DHCD supports this amendment.

Interlineated Amendment, page 3, lines 7-10:

(b) A family assisted under the State Program shall be expected to pay not more than ~~{30%}~~40% of its monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities, as determined by [the Department or] the public housing agency AT THE TIME THE FAMILY INITIALLY RECEIVES ASSISTANCE UNDER THE STATE PROGRAM EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED FOR BY REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE FEDERAL HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM.

Public Justice Center **urges a favorable with amendments report on HB 716.** If you have any questions, please contact C. Matthew Hill, hillm@publicjustice.org (410) 625-9409 Ext. 229.