



**HB 709/SB 651 - Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies –
Local Just Cause Termination (Good Cause Eviction)
Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee,
February 18, 2025 at 1:00PM
Position: SUPPORT (FAV)**

The Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (“PBRC”), an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the statewide thought leader and clearinghouse for pro bono civil legal services in Maryland. As the designated pro bono arm of the MSBA, PBRC provides training, mentorship, and pro bono service opportunities to members of the private bar and offers direct legal services to over 6,200 clients annually.

In May 2017, with a grant from the Maryland Judiciary’s Access to Justice Department, PBRC launched the **Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day (TVLD) Program** in Baltimore City Rent Court to provide day-of-court legal representation to tenants who appear unrepresented for their proceedings. Since then, PBRC staff and volunteer attorneys have represented thousands of low-income tenants in both Baltimore City and Baltimore County in multiple types of legal actions that could result in eviction.

An overarching goal of this Program is to promote and preserve stable housing for low-income tenants in Maryland. **PBRC supports HB 709/SB 651 because it represents a vital step toward the achievement of this goal by allowing policymakers to enact local laws outlining the kind of “just cause” policy that their locality needs to protect Maryland renters who face increasingly unstable housing and fears of retaliation and displacement.**

PBRC staff have seen far too many clients who avoid a judgment in court only to find themselves struggling to find new housing anyway because their landlord then refuses to renew their lease (possibly to get a higher rent, to avoid making requested repairs, or simply due to personality conflicts). We have worked with tenants who are elderly and have lived in the same place for decades as well as those who are young families with a desire to stay in the same neighborhood due to job and school connections. In addition to being uprooted from their community, in a rental market in which 79% of low-income tenants must pay more than 30% of their income on rent and where there are only 59 affordable homes available for every 100 renters¹, it is not surprising that many of our clients simply cannot find suitable housing after an unexpected lease non-renewal. **HB 709/SB 651 would allow jurisdictions the flexibility to address these issues legislatively through local “Just Cause” legislation. As such it could potentially have a direct positive effect on many of our clients and their communities.**

Maryland is currently a “no cause” state, which means that a landlord can decide to non-renew a lease without any stated cause. This means that working families and their children face the constant threat of displacement, even when they follow all the rules. They are under pressure to stay quiet and accept declining conditions, arbitrary policies, and increasing rents just to stay in their communities and keep their children in their local school.

Local “Just Cause” legislation addresses this uncertainty by requiring a landlord to disclose the reason for choosing not to renew a lease. HB 709/SB 651 provides a list of options for what would constitute “just cause,” but leaves the specifics up to the local jurisdictions. The allowable “just cause” provisions may include a substantial breach of lease, disorderly conduct, illegal activity, refusing to grant landlord access to the home and a desire to recover the premises for

¹ National Low Income Housing Coalition Gap Report, <https://nlihc.org/gap/state/md>

family use. Requiring landlords to disclose the reason for a lease non-renewal helps ensure that no eviction takes place under a cover of silence that can hide discriminatory intent. **Maryland is one of only five states that explicitly prohibits localities from passing good cause eviction laws.**

HB 709/SB 651 recognizes that local legislatures want to assist renting families with stable housing so that they are able contribute long-term to the workforce and the local economy. Requiring that a landlord state a legitimate reason for an eviction through lease non-renewal eviction boosts the stability of families, neighborhoods, and communities. By allowing local jurisdictions to do this without fear of preemption, **HB 709/SB 651 has the potential to be a game-changer in terms of community stabilization and tenants' rights.**

For the above reasons,

PBRC urges a FAVORABLE report on HB 709/SB 651.

Please contact Katherine Davis, Director of PBRC's Courtroom Advocacy Project, with any questions.

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