



TESTIMONY

**Maryland General Assembly
Senate - Judicial Proceedings Committee
In Opposition of SB556 - Real Property - Fraudulent Possession and Unauthorized Lease
or Listing - Prohibition and Removal**

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Feb. 6, 2025 at 1:00PM**

Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Committee members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Emilee Towey and I am speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Renters Alliance as one of our outreach coordinators. The Renters Alliance is Maryland's first and only regional nonprofit dedicated exclusively to renter outreach, education, organizing, and advocacy. Since our founding in 2010, the Renters Alliance has been an unwavering advocate for expanding and strengthening renter protections. Our mission to help renters directly contradicts SB556 and its intention to deny tenants their constitutional right to defend themselves before a court when they are in danger of losing their property.

The Renters Alliance strongly opposes SB556 because it enables property owners to circumvent due process eviction procedures, leaving tenants vulnerable to unjust removals from their homes. SB556 further perpetuates uneven power dynamics between landlords and tenants by allowing property owners to simply submit a written request to the sheriff for an immediate eviction of someone they *claim* is not the lawful tenant, without ever having to step foot in court to prove their accusation. SB556 unnecessarily encourages property owners to fast track the removal of tenants from their property without providing the tenant with an opportunity to be heard. This makes the sheriff both judge and jury - which is a dangerous precedent to set.

We are unfortunately very familiar with bad actors' efforts to diminish renters' rights and disrupt stable housing. Residents of rental housing already face a lack of due process without just-cause eviction protections. Landlords are currently allowed to non-renew any tenant with just 60 days notice, and they do not have to provide a reason for the request to vacate. If SB556 were to pass, landlords' unchecked power would only grow as they could then legally skip the process of filing and appearing in court to present the facts to a judge and can instead escalate to having the sheriff forcibly remove the tenant. We too often see predatory landlords abuse the lack of just cause protections to constructively evict tenants who complain about unsafe conditions and not receiving the services that they pay for and are entitled to. We caution that SB556 will be another protected avenue for predatory landlords to evict tenants who they do not like, and under this bill no judge will be required to weigh in to balance the scales.

The Renters Alliance firmly believes in renters' right to due process. We strongly urge an unfavorable report. Thank you for your time.