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SB0651 –Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies – Local Good Cause Termination (Good Cause Eviction)

**Hearing of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 18, 2025**

Position: Favorable

Community Legal Services is pleased to submit this testimony in strong support of SB0651.

Community Legal Services (CLS) is a nonprofit legal services organization dedicated to ensuring equitable access to justice and promoting individual, family and community well-being and stability. We provide free legal services in a broad area of legal matters, including eviction prevention legal services. We provide holistic services designed to promote housing and economic stability in our clients' lives, including helping to connect clients with access to alternative housing when necessary.

The Need for Good Cause Protections

Under current Maryland law, landlords are not required to provide a reason when choosing not to renew a lease, even when a tenant has complied with all lease terms and maintained their home responsibly. This legal gap exposes tenants to sudden displacement without warning or justification. It is particularly harmful to low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities who often face insurmountable challenges when forced to move unexpectedly.

Through our work with clients experiencing housing instability, we have seen firsthand the devastating impact that arbitrary lease non-renewals have on tenants, especially tenants with limited financial resources and those who rely on the community around them for their social and financial well-being and stable educational resources for their children. *When individuals and families are forced to relocate, they don't just lose the roof over their heads, they also lose the community surrounding and supporting them.*

Impact on Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities

Seniors and individuals with disabilities face significant challenges when forced to move due to arbitrary lease non-renewals. Many rely on fixed incomes, making it difficult to afford the high costs of relocating, including security deposits, moving expenses, and application fees. The search for accessible housing is often long and arduous, as many rental units lack necessary accommodations such as wheelchair accessibility, grab bars, or elevator access. Additionally, the stress and physical strain of moving can be particularly detrimental to those with mobility limitations or chronic health conditions. Displacement can also sever critical support networks, including caregivers, medical providers, and community services that help maintain independence and well-being. For these vulnerable populations, an unexpected lease non-renewal is not just an inconvenience - it can lead to serious health risks, increased isolation, and, in the worst cases, homelessness.

Impact on Housing Voucher Holders

For tenants using Housing Choice Vouchers and other housing vouchers, the consequences of non-renewal are also particularly severe. Voucher holders already face limited housing options due to source-of-income discrimination (unlawful, but still unfortunately a factor) and a highly competitive rental market. When forced to move due to a landlord's unilateral decision not to renew a lease, voucher holders face several hardships:

1. **High Moving Costs:** Relocating involves significant expenses, including security deposits, first month's rent, moving fees, and application costs. For families living on fixed incomes, these costs can be financially crippling.
2. **Disruptions to Employment and Education:** Forced moves frequently result in job loss or reduced work hours, as tenants struggle to navigate the logistics of relocation. For children, changing schools can cause academic setbacks, social instability, and emotional distress.
3. **Increased Risk of Homelessness:** The time-limited nature of Housing Choice Vouchers means that if a tenant cannot secure a new rental within a specific window, they risk losing their voucher entirely. In many cases, this results in homelessness or extended stays in substandard housing.

A Balanced Approach to Housing Stability

SB0651 is enabling legislation. **It does not impose a requirement that all jurisdictions adopt good cause requirements for nonrenewal of leases.** Instead, it grants local jurisdictions the authority to adopt good cause protections if they determine it necessary and in the best interests of the residents of their community. This approach allows for local

flexibility. It simply puts an additional tool in the pocket of local jurisdictions that can be used – if they choose - to promote and preserve economic and housing stability in their communities.

Even if a county adopts the provisions of SB0651, landlords in that county would not be prohibited from terminating leases when there is a valid reason, such as non-payment of rent, lease violations, or plans to remove a unit from the rental market. It simply ensures that tenants who comply with their lease terms are not displaced without cause. This balance protects responsible landlords while preventing unnecessary evictions that disrupt lives and communities.

Conclusion

Stable housing is the foundation of economic security, educational success, and community well-being. SB0651 is a critical step toward ensuring that Maryland individuals and families are not unfairly displaced due to arbitrary lease non-renewals. CLS urges the committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on this bill to support efforts to provide housing stability for Maryland's most vulnerable residents.

Please feel free to contact Jessica Quincosa, Executive Director, and Lisa Sarro, Director of Litigation and Advocacy, with any questions at quincosa@clspgc.org and sarro@clspgc.org, respectively.