



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony

SB 651: Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Good Cause Termination (Good Cause Eviction)

Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. I hope we can all agree on this fundamental principle: Whether a homeowner or a renter across race, class, and zip code—all Marylanders deserve the chance to put down roots in their communities, and that is the intent of **SB 651**.

We often hear about the urgent need to build more affordable housing, but what we don't hear enough about is how we keep residents in their homes. How do we ensure children stay in the same schools? How do we keep seniors close to their doctors? How do we allow essential workers to remain near their jobs? This bill is about addressing these questions by giving counties the option to pass good cause eviction legislation if they choose to do so.

One key aspect of this bill has been lost in the conversation: This is **local enabling legislation** only. It does not impose a statewide mandate; it simply unties the hands of counties that want to pass good cause eviction laws. If a county does not want to implement such legislation, they don't have to. But if they do, our bill ensures that they can integrate good cause protections with other housing policies to meet local needs effectively.

We have heard from **41 county officials** who want this tool in their toolbox. And this is not a radical idea. **Eight other states**, including Colorado and New York just in the past year, and **23 counties and cities** nationwide, have already passed good cause eviction laws. Maryland, however, is **one of only five states** that outright prohibit counties from doing so. **That kind of refusal to allow local control to meet local needs... that is what's radical.**

At its core, this bill simply requires a landlord to provide a legitimate reason for evicting a tenant. That is not radical it is common sense. If someone is trying to put you out of your home, you deserve to know why. Yet, each year in Maryland, there are over **5,000 eviction cases** where landlords are not required to show any cause for eviction.

The Maryland House of Delegates passed this bill last year in nearly the same form. One of our panelists will speak to the minor changes made, but the most significant revision tightens language around the small landlord exemption. **If you own five or fewer properties in Maryland, you remain exempt.** This means small landlords are not affected. However, this bill ensures that large corporate landlords cannot hide behind multiple LLCs to claim they are small

landlords. The list of **nine legitimate reasons** for eviction remains unchanged from last year's bill.

So, who does this legislation impact?

1. **Families facing eviction.** When corporate landlords engage in no-cause evictions, families are forced to uproot their lives, disrupting their schools, jobs, and support systems.
2. **Black children.** Due to systemic and structural racism, **one in four Black children in renting households** faces the threat of eviction each year.
3. **Entire neighborhoods.** When renters fear reporting hazardous conditions due to the risk of eviction, properties fall into disrepair, leading to blight and decreasing property values for everyone.

I understand that concerns have been raised about anti-retaliation laws and housing development. I appreciate that discussion, but those issues do not change the central point of this bill: **Untying the hands of counties to make local decisions about their housing policies.** If eight other states and 23 localities can do this, Maryland should not be left behind.

At a time of rising budget deficits and increasing pressure on social services, we must do everything in our power to give Marylanders the opportunity to stay in their homes. This **costs the state nothing**, yet it provides essential protections for working families.

Lastly, this issue is personal to me. As I have mentioned before, I was evicted. I was homeless. Many things were happening at the time, but I cannot imagine a just society where a landlord can remove someone from their home—potentially making them homeless—without providing a valid reason. If counties want to pass laws ensuring that tenants are treated fairly, they should be allowed to do so. That is all this bill seeks to accomplish.

Last year, the House passed this bill. Now, it is our turn to step up. Thank you, and I respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report on SB 651.