

FEBRUARY 6, 2026

Court Review is Essential to a Fair and Safe Eviction Process

Position Statement Opposing Senate Bill 556

Given before the Judicial Proceedings Committee

SB 556 creates significant risks to Maryland families and communities by allowing landlords to request eviction without judicial oversight. Adopting this legislation would exacerbate homelessness, increase predatory evictions, and disproportionately harm Black and Brown Marylanders. This legislation strips tenants of their constitutional rights, emboldens predatory landlords, and creates a dangerous precedent where law enforcement officers act as both judge and jury in eviction proceedings—without court oversight. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy opposes Senate Bill 556 because it will increase homelessness and the potential for violent encounters with law enforcement in our communities.**

MDCEP is committed to advancing policy solutions that create a more equitable Maryland, where all residents—regardless of race, income, or background—have the opportunity to thrive. We work to dismantle systemic barriers to economic prosperity and ensure that policies prioritize those who have been historically marginalized, particularly Black and Brown communities who bear the brunt of economic and housing instability. SB 556 runs counter to these values by exacerbating racial inequities and placing Maryland's most vulnerable residents at even greater risk.

SB 556 undermines fundamental due process protections by allowing landlords to request evictions without any judicial oversight. Under this bill, an individual merely claiming to be a property owner could submit a written request to law enforcement, leading to the immediate displacement of tenants—many of whom are legitimate renters. This lack of oversight will empower predatory landlords to target tenants who report unsafe conditions, further worsening Maryland's housing crisis.

We are deeply concerned about the following:

- 1. Escalation of Homelessness**

Studies show that up to 25% of evicted families become homeless. Those who fall victim to rental scams are particularly vulnerable, as they often have fewer resources to secure alternative housing. Maryland's history of housing discrimination has already left Black and Brown families disproportionately at risk of eviction, and SB 556 would only worsen this crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 73% of Maryland households that received eviction prevention funds were Black, and 71% were woman-led households. This bill would place these families in an even more precarious situation.

- 2. Increased Risk of Violent Encounters with Law Enforcement**

Evictions are already fraught with tension, and removing the court's role will only increase the likelihood

of dangerous confrontations between tenants, landlords, and law enforcement. The eviction court process exists to ensure due process and reduce conflict. By circumventing this system, SB 556 increases the risk of violence, particularly against Black and Brown tenants who are disproportionately criminalized in housing disputes.

3. **Expanding the Reach of Rental Scams**

Rental fraud is a growing crisis, costing renters an estimated \$16.1 billion annually. A 2022 survey found that 44% of renters have either personally experienced or know someone who has fallen victim to a rental scam. SB 556 provides no safeguards for tenants who may have unknowingly entered into fraudulent leases, allowing scammers and bad-faith landlords to exploit legal loopholes. Maryland should focus on addressing rental fraud through stronger consumer protections, not through policies that accelerate homelessness.

4. **Aligning Maryland with Harmful National Trends**

SB 556 is modeled after legislation promoted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and has already been enacted in states like Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, Georgia, and West Virginia. These laws have led to increased evictions, rising homelessness, and greater financial instability for vulnerable residents. Maryland should reject this harmful policy and instead focus on evidence-based solutions that promote housing security and economic stability.

Rather than rushing to implement SB 556, Maryland should conduct a thorough study on the state's wrongful detainer process to determine the best path forward. Questions that must be answered include:

- What is the actual timeline for wrongful detainer cases from filing to eviction?
- How can law enforcement and courts better protect residents from wrongful evictions while ensuring property owners' rights are upheld?
- What technological and procedural improvements can be implemented to reduce fraudulent leasing practices?

Maryland must not follow the path of states that have chosen to prioritize property owners over the constitutional rights of tenants. Instead, we should work together to craft policies that protect renters, prevent homelessness, and uphold the principles of fairness and justice for all. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy urges this Committee to reject SB 556 and instead support policies that ensure fair, just, and equitable housing for all Marylanders.**

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 556

Bill Summary

SB 556 would empower property owners to evict residents without court process and effectively make the Sheriff the judge and jury in every case.

Background

Many tenants and residents with the right to reside at the property will be evicted by predatory owners without court process. SB 556 strips residents of their constitutional right to have any eviction defense heard before a court. Instead, someone who claims to be the property owner (but may not actually be the owner) submits a written request to the sheriff for the eviction of someone who they claim is not a tenant, and the sheriff becomes the judge and jury on whether a family becomes homeless.

Rental scams are pervasive and increasing. Victims of these scams will quickly be made homeless under SB 556. A 2022 survey of renters showed that 44% of renters have personally experienced or are aware of someone who has lost money due to rental scams. The financial losses are estimated at a staggering \$16.1 billion.ⁱ Such rental scams have spiked in recent years, with the Better Business Bureau reporting a 45% increase in rental scam complaints over the past two years.ⁱⁱ In one 2018 survey, more than 5 million renters reported losing money in such scams.ⁱⁱⁱ

Equity Implications

SB 556 will have a disparate impact on Black, woman-led households. Maryland's long history of housing segregation and discriminatory policies mean that Black and Brown Marylanders are much more likely to be renters and at risk of eviction, and therefore more likely to be most in need of affordable housing and become victims of rental scams. 73% of Maryland households that obtained eviction prevention funds in the pandemic's wake identified as Black, and 71% identified as being woman-led.^{iv}

Impact

Senate Bill 556 will likely **worsen racial, health and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Rental Scams: A Crisis Demanding Tech-Driven Solutions (2024) <https://www.ziprent.com/blog/articles/rental-scams-a-crisis-demanding-tech-driven-solutions>

ⁱⁱ Rental Fraudsters Prey On Desperation in Tight Housing Market (024) <https://use.rently.com/blog/rental-fraudsters-prey-on-desperation-in-tight-housing-market/>

ⁱⁱⁱ More Than 5 Million Renters Report They Lost Money from Online Fraud (2018) <https://www.parealtors.org/blog/more-than-5-million-renters-report-they-have-lost-money-from-online-fraud/>

^{iv} MEPFA Information Flyer (2024) https://mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/MEPFA-EPF-Policy-Analysis_v3.pdf