



SB-556 Real Property – Fraudulent Possession and Unauthorized Lease or Listing – Prohibition and Removal

Date: February 6th, 2025

Time: 1:00pm

POSITION: OPPOSE

Unfavorable Testimony on Senate Bill 556

The SOS Fund, an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, addresses the systemic housing instability experienced by historically red-lined communities in Baltimore City. This instability has resulted in generations of residents losing their homes, equity and community. **The SOS Fund opposes Senate Bill 556, "Real Property – Fraudulent Possession and Unauthorized Lease or Listing – Prohibition and Removal." This bill sets a dangerous precedent in the housing space, posing a grave threat to the rights and dignity of homeowners who have lost their properties due to ground rent foreclosures.**

The SOS Fund opposes Senate Bill 556, "Real Property – Fraudulent Possession and Unauthorized Lease or Listing – Prohibition and Removal." This bill sets a dangerous precedent in the housing space, posing a grave threat to the rights and dignity of homeowners who have lost their properties due to ground rent foreclosures.

Under SB 556, individuals who lose their homes through ground rent foreclosure risk being treated not as former homeowners, but as unlawful occupants—effectively equating them with squatters. Our organization, The SOS Fund, works with homeowners who are in this situation and it is our experience that either have attempted to pay their ground rent, but the management companies handling payments have changed address, or they are facing financial hardship.

SB 556 lacks safeguards to distinguish between bad actors and vulnerable individuals caught in legal and financial distress. Treating these former homeowners as trespassers undermines their dignity, exacerbates their hardship, and strips them of fundamental legal protections.

This legislation authorizes property owners or their agents to request immediate removal of individuals from residential properties without the due process protections typically afforded in eviction proceedings. The sheriff is empowered to serve an immediate vacate notice, change locks, and even

For the above reasons,

The SOS Fund urges an unfavorable position on this bill. Please contact John Kern, Director of Programs, with any questions.
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arrest individuals for trespassing, all without a judicial determination of the occupant's legal status or consideration of extenuating circumstances.

In conclusion, SB 556 overreaches in a manner that endangers the rights of legitimate, yet vulnerable, individuals. I urge the committee to reject this bill in its current form and to consider revisions that ensure fairness, due process, and respect for all Maryland residents.

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