



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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February 6, 2025

Chairman William C. Smith, Jr.
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Smith, Jr., Vice Chairman Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers strong favorable support for Senate Bill 514 (SB0514) –Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act. This bill introduces essential reforms to Maryland’s housing laws by prohibiting landlords from unfairly discriminating against prospective tenants based solely on their criminal history, thereby fostering equitable access to housing for all Marylanders. Senate Bill 514 is a 2025 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.

Housing discrimination based on criminal history disproportionately impacts Black Marylanders due to longstanding racial disparities in the criminal justice system. According to a 2022 Prison Policy Initiative report, Black individuals in Maryland are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white individuals, making them more likely to face housing barriers upon reentry. By ensuring that landlords evaluate applicants fairly and consider mitigating circumstances, this bill directly addresses systemic inequities and promotes stable housing opportunities for returning citizens.

Senate Bill 514 establishes a fair and transparent tenant screening process by prohibiting landlords from inquiring about criminal history before making a conditional housing offer. It ensures that only the most serious and relevant convictions can be considered, preventing arbitrary exclusions that disproportionately affect Black Marylanders. Research from the National Low Income Housing Coalition indicates that stable housing is a critical factor in reducing recidivism, as individuals with secure housing are 60% less likely to reoffend.

Additionally, this bill strengthens consumer protections by requiring landlords to provide written explanations when withdrawing conditional offers due to criminal history. It allows prospective tenants to present evidence of rehabilitation, inaccuracies, or mitigating factors, ensuring that past mistakes do not serve as permanent barriers to stable housing. These provisions align with best practices in housing policy that emphasize individualized assessments over blanket exclusions. By expanding access to housing, Senate Bill 514 promotes economic mobility and community stability. Secure housing enables returning citizens to seek employment, support their families, and reintegrate into society successfully.

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Studies have shown that individuals denied housing due to criminal history are at significantly higher risk of homelessness, which disproportionately affects Black communities. The Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act ensures that returning citizens have a fair opportunity to secure stable housing, reducing racial disparities and strengthening communities across the state.

Senate Bill 514 represents a thoughtful and necessary step toward housing justice. It balances public safety with fairness, ensuring that housing policies reflect Maryland's values of equity and inclusion. For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports Senate Bill 514 and urges a favorable report.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland