



---

**HB 271 – Real Property - Expedited Wrongful Detainer Proceedings - Property for Sale or Lease**  
**Hearing before the House Judiciary Committee**  
**March 5, 2025**  
**Position: Unfavorable**

The Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (“PBRC”), an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the statewide thought leader and clearinghouse for pro bono civil legal services in Maryland. As the designated pro bono arm of the MHBA, PBRC provides training, mentorship, and pro bono service opportunities to members of the private bar and offers direct legal services to over 6,200 clients annually.

In May 2017, with a grant from the Maryland Judiciary’s Access to Justice Department, PBRC launched the **Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day (TVLD) Program** in Baltimore City Rent Court to provide day-of-court legal representation to tenants who appear unrepresented for their proceedings. Since then, this continually expanding Program has allowed PBRC staff and volunteer attorneys to represent thousands of low-income tenants in both Baltimore City and Baltimore County in multiple types of legal actions that could result in eviction.

**While we sympathize with the situation that HB 271 is attempting to remedy, PBRC opposes HB 271 as written because it will deprive some of our most vulnerable clients of constitutional due process prior to eviction.** HB 271 amends the wrongful detainer statute (Real Property Code § 14-132) to eliminate the requirement of mailing the complaint to the residents and require that a trial occur within five (5) days of filing in certain situations. This expedited procedure will be used to evict low-income tenants from their homes without sufficient due process – due process that is not only humane but constitutionally required prior to depriving an individual of their home and their possessions.

We frequently accept cases that are filed as wrongful detainer actions despite the existence of a landlord/tenant relationship. Many of these arise when an owner decides to sell the property and wants to remove the tenant quickly. It is clear how the timeline set forth in HB 271 could be weaponized and result in illegal evictions. Low-income individuals in particular – many of whom hourly work jobs, lack transportation or are single mothers caring for young children – require more than a few days to make the arrangements necessary to come to court and mount a defense.

Typically, our clients have a lease but need help proving it. Often the relationship with the landlord is strained and they are already trying to leave. In one case, our client had been paying rent to her aunt for four years while caring for her elderly father (her aunt’s brother). Three weeks after her father died, her aunt filed a wrongful detainer action. We took the case to trial and won, giving our client time to continue her search for better housing and providing a solid timeline for the aunt to list the property for sale. Under HB 271, our client may not have had the time to find an attorney or gather proof of rental payments. She would have been evicted, lost her belongings and potentially become homeless. Another case involved a refugee family with seven children. They too had a lease but would have had difficulty finding it within the few days allotted under HB 271 and would have been rendered homeless. We negotiated a stipulated dismissal that gave them two months to find alternate housing. **Eviction is a serious matter.** Families have a due process right to protect their home and their possessions. We must be careful about the unintended consequences of legislation that could open the door to unconstitutional processes.

For the above reasons,

**PBRC, a member of Renters United Maryland, urges an UNFAVORABLE report on HB 271.**

Please contact Katie Davis, Director of PBRC’s Courtroom Advocacy Project, with any questions.

[kdavis@probonomd.org](mailto:kdavis@probonomd.org) • 443-703-3049