

Dear House Delegates,

My name is Shakia Witherspoon, and I was the proud owner and resident of 5825 Benton Heights Ave., Baltimore, MD 21206, for 13 years (2008–2021). I took great care of my home, investing in improvements and maintaining it with love and responsibility. When I decided to sell my house, it was under contract within six days. During the buyer's inspection, a minor issue was identified, and I went to my property with a contractor to fix it—only to find a “No Trespassing” sign in the window and sheets covering the glass. When I knocked, a woman named Kendra Mellerson opened the door. I asked how she had gained entry, and she claimed she was renting the property from someone. The police were called, and despite Kendra presenting a clearly fraudulent two-page lease, law enforcement stated they could not remove her. Instead, I was told I had to file a wrongful detainer and go through the legal system to evict a person who had no legal right to be in my home.

This experience was emotionally and financially devastating. Kendra refused to leave, even after police informed her that the house was under contract with a new buyer. She even had the audacity to bribe me, demanding payment to vacate my own property. Forced into a lengthy legal battle, I had to hire an attorney, draining funds I did not have, because I am not a property investor, while she remained in my home for two months rent-free. During this time, I could not eat or sleep, the stress affecting both my work and well-being. When I finally regained possession of my home after her eviction, I was heartbroken to find that she had trashed everything—destroying what I had built over the years. After faithfully paying my taxes and maintaining my home, I never imagined Baltimore City would allow someone to steal my property, damage it, and leave me to pick up the pieces. My repeated pleas for help were met with resistance, as though I was the one in the wrong for demanding justice.

No homeowner should ever endure what I went through. I am urging immediate reform to protect property owners from fraudulent squatters who manipulate the legal system. A person holding a fake lease should not have more rights than a taxpaying homeowner. The law must empower police to remove squatters immediately when fraudulent documents are identified, instead of forcing owners into a prolonged and costly court battle. The eviction process for unlawful occupants should be expedited, and there must be harsher penalties for those who engage in property fraud. I am calling on you, as our elected leaders, to enact meaningful policy changes so that no other Maryland homeowner suffers as I did. The emotional and financial toll this has taken on me is immeasurable. I deserve justice, and so do countless others facing this same nightmare. It is time to put an end to squatters taking advantage of Maryland's broken laws.

Sincerely,

Shakia Witherspoon

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