

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Economic Matters Committee.

My name is Vanesa Pinto. I serve as the Empowerment and Leadership Development Program Director at CHEER, a community-based non-profit serving Long Branch in Silver Spring. I am also a member of the Long Branch Housing Action Team, a proud Long Branch resident, and a renter. I am here in strong support of HR 774, Good Cause Eviction.

I am honored to speak on behalf of many of my neighbors who cannot be here today—not because they do not care, but because they are afraid.

- Afraid of landlord retaliation.
- Afraid to report housing code violations.
- Afraid that raising concerns will cost them their home.
- And in many cases, afraid because of their immigration status.

Long Branch sits in the Purple Line corridor. In communities shaped by transit-oriented development, rising property values often mean rising displacement. Landlords purchase properties with the intention to sell or redevelop for profit—and without strong protections, tenants are the first to be pushed out.

In May 2025, the Long Branch Housing Action Team surveyed residents ahead of a meeting with District 20 elected officials. Of the 33 respondents, 81.8% said they were afraid of eviction or non-renewal if they spoke up about problems in their housing.

Behind that statistic are real families.

- A landlord retaliated after a tenant organizer helped residents recover illegal rent increases in a building listed on Montgomery County's Troubled Properties list.
- A mother has spent her own limited income for months trying to control a roach infestation because she is too afraid to report it.
- Another neighbor lives with mold, a cracked ceiling, and only two working stove burners—but she stays silent out of fear that her lease will not be renewed.

This is not about bad tenants. This is about families who want safe, stable housing and who are too afraid to ask for it.

HR 774 would not prevent evictions for lawful reasons. It would simply ensure that eviction is not used as a weapon against tenants who assert their basic rights.

No one should have to choose between safe housing and keeping a roof over their children's heads.

If landlords can evict without good cause, they can clear buildings simply to redevelop or flip them to another investor.

We need Good Cause Eviction to ensure that growth does not come at the cost of stability, and that long-time residents are not displaced without a legitimate reason.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of HR 774. Give families the security to speak up. Give communities the stability they deserve. And send a clear message that in Maryland, safe housing is not a privilege—it is a right.