
BILL NO: House Bill 0059
TITLE: Real Property - Expedited Wrongful Detainer Proceedings – Property for Sale or Lease
COMMITTEE: Economic Matters, Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 5, 2026
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland is a nonprofit legal organization dedicated to protecting the physical safety, economic security, and civil rights of women and their families across Maryland. Through our legal services, policy advocacy, and education, we work with thousands of renters each year—many of whom are survivors of domestic violence, low-income women, elderly tenants, and people with disabilities. Based on our direct experience representing renters harmed by rushed and unfair eviction processes, we oppose HB 59 and urge an unfavorable report, as this bill undermines due process and threatens the housing stability of the very families we serve.

These harms are not speculative. In our legal practice, unlicensed landlords and property flippers have used the wrongful detainer statute to evict lawful tenants by falsely labeling them “squatters.” HB 59 would institutionalize this misuse, allowing eviction proceedings to proceed without adequate notice, meaningful opportunity to be heard, or judicial oversight.

For example, Madison Pleas and her young family leased a Baltimore City home in October 2024. After discovering serious habitability defects and following foreclosure, the unlicensed new owner demanded immediate vacancy and filed a wrongful detainer claim alleging squatting. Legal representation and a court hearing preserved the family’s right to remain; without that process, they would have been wrongfully evicted. Similarly, Christina Cikins and six other elderly or disabled tenants faced eviction by an owner refusing to maintain their property. Judicial review and access to counsel prevented their likely displacement.

These cases underscore why procedural safeguards in wrongful detainer actions are essential. Recognizing the risk of abuse, the General Assembly enacted SB 46 (2025), requiring courts to hear wrongful detainer claims within ten days while maintaining minimal notice and access to counsel. HB 59 would compress this process further, allowing eviction judgments to be entered even if residents are absent, and would:

- Require trial only five days after filing, regardless of notice;
- Eliminate service by first-class mail, contrary to *Greene v. Lindsey*, 456 U.S. 444 (1982); and
- Substantially shorten appeal periods, further diminishing meaningful judicial review.

Assertions of a widespread squatting crisis are not supported by evidence. Expanding “evict-first” policies based on this narrative would primarily benefit property flippers, unlicensed landlords, and other bad actors, while exposing lawful tenants—**particularly survivors of domestic violence, people with disabilities, elderly renters, and Black women**—to wrongful eviction and retaliation. Maryland law already provides adequate tools to address actual squatting and fraudulent leasing through existing criminal statutes and civil wrongful detainer actions. Experience in other states demonstrates that eliminating due process protections leads to serious errors and irreparable harm. The true housing crisis in Maryland is the severe shortage of affordable rental housing and insufficient tenant protections, not squatting. For these reasons, policies should prioritize housing stability and constitutional safeguards, and HB 59 should receive an unfavorable report.