



BILL NO: House Bill 59
TITLE: Real Property - Expedited Wrongful Detainer Proceedings - Property for Sale or Lease
COMMITTEE: Economic Matters
HEARING DATE: February 26, 2026
POSITION: **UNFAVORABLE**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that works to lead diverse community partners toward the common purpose of reducing the occurrence and impact of intimate partner violence. **MNADV respectfully urges an unfavorable report for HB 59.**

When questions arise about whether a renting family has the right to reside in a property, those questions must be answered fairly with notice, due process, and judicial oversight. When an owner claims that a property is for sale, HB 59 would expedite wrongful detainer cases to having a trial within 5 days of the owner filing a complaint – regardless of when the resident first receives the complaint. A person could go on a business trip and return to find they have been evicted from their own home.

House Bill 59 would use the wrongful detainer statute to potentially evict lawful tenants by falsely labeling them "squatters." This will institutionalize this misuse and harm vulnerable renters with a rushed and unfair eviction process. HB 59 would shorten the current requirement of courts to hear wrongful detainer claims from ten days to five (the 10 days was arrived at just last year, pursuant to SB 46), possibly without any notice, would eliminate service by first-class mail, and would substantially shorten appeal periods.

Expanding "evict-first" policies based on unsupported narratives of a widespread "squatter crisis" primarily benefits property flippers, unlicensed landlords, and other bad actors, while exposing lawful tenants - *particularly survivors of domestic violence* - and other vulnerable people - people with disabilities, elderly renters, and Black women - to wrongful eviction and retaliation.

Most importantly from MNADV's perspective, for survivors of domestic violence a common tactic of coercive control is for an abuser to remove the survivor's name from a lease or claim they are an unauthorized occupant. HB 59 provides an abuser with a "litigation shortcut." An

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abuser could theoretically use a fast-tracked Wrongful Detainer action to have a survivor removed from a home under the guise of them being a "squatter," weaponizing the court's rushed timeline to prevent the survivor from proving their residency or seeking a protective order.

In addition, by eliminating service by first-class mail and compressing the hearing timeline to five days, the bill creates a "notice gap." In many jurisdictions, the Sheriff may not even post the notice on the door until day three or four.

A lawful tenant might only receive physical notice of a hearing 24 to 48 hours before they are required to appear in court. This makes it virtually impossible to secure pro bono or other legal counsel or gather evidence (like a lease or proof of payment), leading to "eviction by default."

In a standard Failure to Pay Rent (FTPR) case, Maryland law allows tenants to use "Rent Escrow" if a landlord refuses to fix dangerous conditions (like no heat or lead paint). If a landlord uses the Wrongful Detainer statute (as HB 59 encourages), they bypass the FTPR process entirely. Since "squatters" have no legal rights, the tenant loses their ability to argue that the home is unsafe. This provides a direct incentive for "slumlords" to misclassify tenants to avoid making repairs.

The shortening of the appeal period in HB 59 is particularly devastating because Maryland's District Courts are not "courts of record." To get a fair shake, a tenant often needs a de novo appeal in Circuit Court. By "substantially shortening" this window, HB 59 ensures that even if a judge makes an error on day five, the tenant may be physically removed from the property before an appellate court can even open the file.

We commend you to Public Justice Center's testimony for additional reasons this bill is not a good idea.

For all of the above reasons MNADV respectfully requests an unfavorable report for HB 59.