

Date of Hearing: February 5, 2026

Jo Shifrin  
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**TESTIMONY ON HB 59 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE**

**Real Property - Expedited Wrongful Detainer Hearings - Property for Sale or Lease**

**TO:** Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and members of the Economic Matters Committee

**FROM:** Jo Shifrin

**My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in opposition to HB 59, Real Property - Expedited Wrongful Detainer Hearings - Property for Sale or Lease.**

I moved to Montgomery County in 2014 when I retired. My opposition to this legislation comes from my belief in Jewish values. *Tikkun Olam* is an obligation to make the world a better place for everyone and *Dei Machsoro* means we must make certain that everyone has what they need to both live and thrive. The need for safe housing is central to Jewish beliefs. Jewish texts speak about the obligation of both landlords and tenants, the way to construct a safe home, etc.

The first thing my husband and I did when we arrived in Montgomery County was to look for a home. We both believe that having a home provides the foundation for having a good life. When you have a home, you can raise a family, make friends, and otherwise feel secure. But HB 59 will deny renters a meaningful opportunity to be heard in certain eviction cases and will lead to more evictions and homelessness. HB 59 will allow unlicensed landlords and owners who want to flip a property to evict renting families without a fair hearing merely by calling them squatters when they are not.

I know of two such cases:

- I. A woman and her family signed a one year lease in October 2024. Within a month, they discovered serious defects. The property went into foreclosure and the new owner –an unlicensed landlord demanded that they vacate immediately and filed a wrongful detainer case alleging they were squatters. (Fortunately, with legal representation and a court hearing, they were able to remain rather than have been evicted.

2. 7 disabled or elderly tenants faced eviction when an owner, an unlicensed landlord, refused to maintain the property, claimed they were squatters, and filed a wrongful detainer complaint. Only legal assistance kept them from being evicted and becoming homeless.

The General Assembly passed legislation resolving this issue last year. In response to concerns about alleged squatting, SB 46 was passed in 2025 to expedite “wrongful detainer” cases. Effective October 1, 2025, the law requires the court to hear any wrongful detainer claim within 10 days. Residents accused of squatting receive very little notice and have little opportunity to see legal counsel and prepare a defense. **HB 59 would expedite this process even more: a tenant could leave town for a long weekend and return to find that a court had entered an eviction judgement against them!**

- HB 59 will require that a trial be held 5 days after a complaint is filed regardless of when or even if the tenants receive a copy of the complaint
- HB 59 will unconstitutionally remove the requirement that the complaint be served on the residents by first-class mail (*See Greene v Lindsey, 456 U.S. 444 (1982)*)
- HB 59 will drastically shorten the appeal period which further erodes due process

Any time a property flipper or unlicensed landlord claims the property is for sale, they could delay the renting family access to a full and fair hearing.

Claims of widespread squatting are false. Ultra conservative media and right wing organizations are spreading this false narrative to justify policies that strip residents of their rights and will harm the most vulnerable residents of Maryland, including Black women, differently abled people, and the survivors of domestic abuse.

It would be a much better use of the General Assembly’s time to focus on solutions to the crisis of inadequate numbers of affordable housing units and the lack of basic tenant protections.

Keeping people in their homes is a humane and effective housing policy; HB 59 is neither.

**I oppose HB 59 and urge the committee to issue an unfavorable report.**