

Disclosing All Rental Fees Would Help Tenants Make Informed Decisions

Position Statement Supporting House Bill 80

Given before the Economics Matter Committee

The Maryland Center on Economic Policy works to advance policies that expand economic opportunity, reduce poverty, and build broadly shared prosperity for all Marylanders. Stable and affordable housing is a foundational component of economic security. Yet for too many renters, the true cost of housing is unpredictable and unclear. Across Maryland, renters are increasingly confronted with a growing list of “add-on” charges—application fees, processing fees, amenity fees, technology fees, trash fees, parking fees, and more. House Bill 80 would require landlords to clearly disclose all mandatory fees to prospective tenants before a lease is signed, prohibit undisclosed mandatory fees, and create a reasonable enforcement mechanism for tenants harmed by violations. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 80 because it ensures that tenants can make informed decisions about where to live and protects them from hidden costs that undermine household budgets.**

Renters are increasingly confronted with a growing list of “add-on” charges, including application, processing, amenity, technology, trash, and parking fees. These costs are often not disclosed upfront and can add hundreds of dollars per year to the advertised rent. For families already struggling with high housing costs, surprise fees can be the difference between stability and displacement. HB 80 addresses this problem by bringing transparency and fairness to the rental process. It ensures that tenants can make informed decisions about where to live and protects them from hidden costs that undermine household budgets.

Under current law, there is no clear statewide standard requiring landlords to disclose all mandatory fees in advance. This lack of transparency creates confusion, enables unfair practices, and disproportionately harms the renters with the fewest resources to absorb extra costs.

HB 80 establishes a common-sense solution by:

- Requiring landlords who operate four or more rental units to provide clear information about all mandatory fees before a lease is signed;
- Prohibiting landlords from imposing fees that were not properly disclosed;
- Applying the protections to leases signed or renewed on or after October 1, 2026; and
- Allowing tenants to seek accountability through a limited claims process beginning February 1, 2027.

For many renters, even a \$50 or \$75 monthly fee can mean choosing between paying rent and paying for groceries, transportation, or childcare. Transparency in housing costs is therefore not just a consumer protection issue—it is a racial and economic justice issue.

By ensuring that renters know the full cost of housing upfront, HB 80 promotes fairness and equity in a rental market that has too often worked against low-income communities and communities of color. At its core, HB 80 is about honesty, predictability, and fairness. No Maryland family should sign a lease only to discover later that the real cost of their housing is far higher than they were told.

This bill will help renters make informed choices, encourage responsible business practices, and support housing stability across our state. For these reasons, **the Maryland Center on Economic Policy urges a favorable report on House Bill 80.**

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 80

Bill Summary

House Bill 80 would require landlords to clearly disclose all mandatory fees to prospective tenants before a lease is signed, prohibit undisclosed mandatory fees, and create a reasonable enforcement mechanism for tenants harmed by violations.

Background

Maryland is amid an affordability crisis:

- Nearly half of Maryland renters are cost-burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income toward housing.
- Low-income households have virtually no margin for unexpected expenses.
- Rising rents have already pushed many families to the financial brink.

While rent increases receive significant attention, the growth of mandatory fees has quietly become another way housing costs escalate. Because these fees are often not clearly disclosed until after a tenant has invested time and money in the application process—or even after moving in—renters lack meaningful ability to compare housing options or plan their budgets.

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Equity Implications.

Housing affordability and instability do not affect all Marylanders equally. Due to a long history of housing discrimination, wage gaps, and unequal access to homeownership, Black and Latino households in Maryland are far more likely to be renters than white households. They are also more likely to be cost-burdened and to have lower household savings.

Hidden and unpredictable fees disproportionately harm these communities by:

- Increasing the risk of rent delinquency and eviction;

- Making it harder for families to plan financially;
- Creating barriers to moving to safer or higher-opportunity neighborhoods; and
- Exacerbating existing racial wealth gaps.

Impact

House Bill 80 will likely **improve racial, health and economic equity** in Maryland.