

Expedited Evictions Would Put More Maryland Families at Risk of Homelessness

Position Statement Opposing House Bill 59

Given before the Economic Matters and Judiciary Committees

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. House Bill 59 undermines these fundamental protections and would place thousands of Maryland renters—particularly Black and Brown families—at heightened risk of wrongful eviction and homelessness. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 59 because it will deny renters a meaningful opportunity to be heard in certain eviction cases and lead to more evictions and homelessness.**

HB 59 will allow unlicensed landlords and property flippers to evict renting families like Madison Pleas and her young family without a fair hearing merely by calling them “squatters” when they are not.¹

- Madison Pleas and her young family signed a one-year lease in Baltimore City in October 2024. Within a month, they discovered serious defects, including a furnace fire. After the property went into foreclosure, the new owner (an unlicensed landlord) demanded that they vacate immediately and filed a wrongful detainer case alleging they were squatters. With legal representation and a court hearing, Madison’s family was able to assert their right to remain. Without this process they would have been evicted.
- Christina Cikins and six other elderly or disabled tenants faced eviction when a new owner (an unlicensed landlord) refused to maintain the property, claimed they were squatters and filed a wrongful detainer complaint. Without legal assistance, they would likely have become homeless. Christina said, “We have nowhere to go. Absolutely nowhere.”

The General Assembly passed legislation resolving this issue just last year. In response to concerns about alleged squatting, the General Assembly passed SB 46 in 2025 to expedite “wrongful detainer” cases. Effective October 1, 2025, the bill requires the court to hear any wrongful detainer claim within 10 days, making it one of the fastest judicial processes in the state. Residents accused of squatting receive minimum notice, have little opportunity to seek legal counsel, and have a very limited time to prepare a defense.

HB 59 would rush the process even further. Residents could leave town for a weekend and return to find that a court had entered an eviction judgment against them. HB 59 will:

- Require a trial be only 5 days after a complaint is filed regardless of when the residents received the complaint – if at all.

- Unconstitutionally remove the requirement that the complaint be served on the residents by first-class mail.
- Dramatically 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 deny the renting family access to a full and fair hearing.

Claims of a widespread squatting epidemic are not supported by evidence.ⁱⁱ Despite this, special interest groups have manufactured a narrative that lawlessness and squatting are rampant, using it to justify policies that strip residents of their constitutional rights and push “evict first, ask questions later” bills — even fueling the Trump Administration’s call for National Guard deployments in cities like D.C., Chicago, Portland, and Los Angeles.ⁱⁱⁱ

Weaponizing the “squatter” label to pass laws that strip down judicial oversight over evictions will benefit property flippers, unlicensed landlords, and other bad actors, and harm the most vulnerable Marylanders.^{iv} Claiming a rightful occupant is a “squatter”, can be used as a tool for personal revenge. Survivors of domestic abuse and their children are particularly at risk, as well as disabled people. No matter the context of the allegation, Black women, who are already disproportionately affected by eviction, will suffer most under an evict-first approach.

Law enforcement already has tools to address alleged squatting and scammers who offer fraudulent leases. Squatting is already a crime in Maryland under trespass or burglary. Offering a fraudulent lease is already a crime in Maryland.² In addition to the filing of a civil case for wrongful detainer, law enforcement already has the tools it needs to effectively prosecute squatting as well as bad actors who deceive renters into leasing properties.

Evict-first laws in other states demonstrate the real-world dangers of stripping due process. In Florida, a family in Pensacola was evicted with only 15 minutes’ notice under new legislation pushed by Governor Ron DeSantis.^v The sheriff acted on a fraudulent owner’s claim, evicting senior residents and allowing the sale of their belongings.

The real crisis in Maryland is not “squatting,” but a shortage of 275,000 affordable rental units and the lack of basic tenant protections like good cause eviction.^{vi} Maryland policymakers should focus on solutions that stabilize families: strengthening fair housing laws, expanding eviction prevention funds, supporting good cause eviction, and creating zoning and administrative policies that spur housing production.

The “Housing First” agenda demonstrates that keeping people in their homes is both humane and effective, whereas ideological evict-first/ask questions later policies put families at risk.^{vii} We urge policymakers to stand with renting families, uphold their constitutional right to allow both sides to be heard before any eviction, and reject the politics of fear.

For these reasons, **the Maryland Center on Economic Policy strongly opposes House Bill 59 and urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report.**

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 59

Bill Summary

House Bill 59 proposes changes to Maryland’s wrongful detainer procedures in cases involving property that is listed for sale or lease by the complainant at the time the complaint is filed. Under the bill, if a property owner or

landlord initiates a wrongful detainer action and the property is advertised for sale or lease, the court must expedite hearings and appeals. Specifically, the District Court or circuit court would be required to issue a warrant of possession within 24 hours if the court rules in favor of the complainant in such expedited proceedings. The bill also clarifies how notice of hearings and appeals must be served, emphasizing personal delivery or conspicuous posting in defined circumstances.

Background

The General Assembly passed SB 46 in 2025 to expedite “wrongful detainer” cases. Effective October 1, 2025, the bill requires the court to hear any wrongful detainer claim within 10 days, making it one of the fastest judicial processes in the state. Residents accused of squatting receive minimum notice, have little opportunity to seek legal counsel, and have a very limited time to prepare a defense.

HB 59 would expedite the process even further, potentially giving tenants a day or two to respond to the allegation. Similar legislation in other states, including Florida, has led to families being evicted from their homes with as little as 15 minutes notice.

Equity Implications

Laws that strip down judicial oversight over evictions will benefit property flippers, unlicensed landlords, and other bad actors while harming the most vulnerable Marylanders. Claiming a rightful occupant is a “squatter”, can be used as a tool for personal revenge. Survivors of domestic abuse and their children are particularly at risk, as well as people with disabilities. No matter the context of the allegation, Black women, who are already disproportionately affected by eviction, will suffer most under an evict-first approach.

Impact

House Bill 59 will likely **worsen racial, health and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ *Maryland squatting bills and the General Assembly. The Banner.* Retrieved January 30, 2026, from <https://www.thebanner.com/community/housing/maryland-squatting-bills-general-assembly-PJLK7YXPHBTPK54WTBVJXVDBI/>

ⁱⁱ Javaid, M., & Paúl, M. L. (2024, April 3). *Squatters have become a right-wing talking point. What to know about the rare practice.* The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/04/03/squatters-rise-florida-ny-georgia/>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Red states crack down on squatters with help from ALEC.* Rolling Stone. Retrieved January 30, 2026, from <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/red-states-crack-down-squatters-alec-1235404301>

^{iv} Maryland Center on Economic Policy. (2023). *MEPFA policy analysis: Maryland’s need for eviction prevention funds (EPF) and the estimated fiscal impact of EPF* (Policy Analysis v3) [PDF]. Maryland Center on Economic Policy. https://mdeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/MEPFA-EPF-Policy-Analysis_v3.pdf

^v *Florida law HB 621 makes it easy to evict squatters but ripe for abuse.* Pensacola News Journal. Retrieved January 30, 2026, from <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/escambia-county/2024/09/03/florida-law-hb-621-makes-it-easy-to-evict-squatters-but-ripe-for-abuse/74994438007/>

^{vi} Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. (2025, July 24). *State of Maryland releases 2025 housing needs assessment.* Maryland.gov. <https://news.maryland.gov/dhcd/2025/07/24/state-of-maryland-releases-2025-housing-needs-assessment/>

^{vii} National Low Income Housing Coalition. (n.d.). *The evidence is clear: Housing First works* [PDF]. <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Evidence.pdf>