

HB 59 - Real Property – Expedited Wrongful Detainer Proceedings – Property for Sale or Lease

Hearing of the House Economic Matters Committee on February 5, 2026

Position: UNFAVORABLE

My name is Micah, and I work directly with individuals and families navigating housing instability across Maryland, including many renters who rely on Housing Choice Vouchers, fixed incomes, or disability benefits. I **strongly oppose HB 59** and urge an **unfavorable** report.

While I understand the sponsor’s stated intent to address concerns around alleged squatting, HB 59 does not strike a fair or constitutional balance. Instead, it dangerously erodes due process protections for renters and creates a fast-track eviction system that will disproportionately harm the very people our housing laws are meant to protect.

In my work, housing is never abstract. It is deeply personal and often precarious. When questions arise about whether a family has the legal right to reside in a property, those questions must be resolved carefully, transparently, and with full judicial oversight. Eviction—especially on an expedited timeline—can result in homelessness, family separation, job loss, and long-term trauma. Because the consequences are so severe, renters must be afforded meaningful notice and a genuine opportunity to be heard.

HB 59 undermines those fundamental protections.

By requiring expedited wrongful detainer proceedings when a property is merely advertised or listed for sale or lease, this bill opens the door for abuse by unlicensed landlords, speculative investors, and property flippers. Simply labeling a rightful occupant a “squatter” should never be enough to strip them of time, notice, and due process—yet HB 59 makes that outcome far more likely.

The bill’s procedural requirements are alarming. Residents could face a hearing only days after a complaint is filed, regardless of whether they actually received notice. Warrants could be issued within 24 hours of a ruling, and appeal timelines are drastically shortened. In practice, this means a renter could leave town briefly or miss a posted notice and return to find that a court has entered an eviction judgment against them—without a fair chance to defend themselves or seek legal counsel.

This is not hypothetical. I work with renters who already struggle to navigate complex legal systems while balancing work, childcare, disability, or medical needs. Accelerating these proceedings further will not promote justice; it will manufacture displacement.

It is also critical to note that the General Assembly already addressed concerns around wrongful detainer proceedings last year. SB 46, passed in 2025 and effective October 1, 2025, requires courts to hear wrongful detainer cases within 10 days—making it one of the fastest judicial processes in the state. HB 59 goes even further, rushing an already expedited process at the expense of constitutional safeguards.

Claims of a widespread squatting crisis are not supported by evidence. Nevertheless, fear-based narratives have been amplified to justify “evict-first, ask-questions-later” policies that strip renters of their rights while empowering bad actors. Weaponizing the term “squatter” has become a convenient way to bypass tenant protections, retaliate against residents, and displace families without accountability.

The harms of this approach will not be evenly distributed. Black renters, women—particularly Black women—elderly individuals, people with disabilities, survivors of domestic violence, and low-income families already face disproportionate eviction rates. HB 59 would intensify these inequities by making it easier to remove people from their homes before the truth can be fully examined.

Importantly, Maryland already has tools to address legitimate concerns about squatting and housing fraud. Trespass and burglary laws exist. Offering fraudulent leases is already illegal. Law enforcement and the courts are not powerless. What HB 59 does is shift the burden onto renters—forcing them to prove their right to housing under impossible timelines—while shielding unscrupulous property owners from scrutiny.

The real housing crisis in Maryland is not squatting. It is the severe shortage of affordable rental housing, the lack of strong tenant protections, and the ongoing displacement of families who are already stretched thin. Policies that stabilize housing—such as eviction prevention, fair hearing processes, and long-term affordability strategies—are proven to be humane and effective. Policies that rush eviction are not.

Maryland should not move backward by weakening due process in the name of expediency. Housing stability requires care, balance, and restraint—especially when people’s lives and livelihoods are at stake.

For these reasons, I respectfully **oppose HB 59** and urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable** report.