



House Bill 1218
**Department of Housing and Community Development – Severe Health and
Safety Risk Properties – Intervention Plan**

Hearing before the House Economic Matters Committee
On March 5, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on HB1218 at the request of bill sponsor Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins.

MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State’s low-income and vulnerable residents. We serve residents in each of Maryland’s 24 jurisdictions and handle a range of civil legal matters, including housing disputes involving substandard conditions. MLA urges the Committee’s favorable report on HB1218, which requires Maryland to establish a comprehensive plan to hold landlords accountable for dangerous property conditions and predatory practices.

Throughout the state, renters face rampant conditions of disrepair, deferred maintenance, and exploitative management practices. While some jurisdictions are resourced with code enforcement divisions and rental licensing programs, others lack these resources. Moreover, in this largely complaint-driven patchwork of localized solutions, Maryland lacks an overarching, unifying agenda for ensuring safe, healthy, well-managed housing across all jurisdictions. Just as the State seeks “housing certainty” for developers on the supply side, the State must also seek housing certainty for renters on the demand side.

To that end, HB 1218 requires the Office of Tenant and Landlord Affairs (OTLA) of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to join with the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) in establishing a statewide plan to:

- (1) Identify “severe health and safety risk properties” in the State;
- (2) Expand OTLA to address severe health and safety risk properties in the State; and
- (3) Provide effective interventions to mitigate predatory, noncompliant, and negligent landlords of multi-unit rental properties in the State

Importantly, HB 1218 does not set targets on all landlords. Instead, it focuses on rental properties that routinely fail to meet basic health and safety standards. This focus includes properties in “continued noncompliance with local housing codes, resulting in chronic unsafe housing conditions”; “severely distressed rental properties”; properties with “repeated cycles of violations,

citations, and failures to remediate”; and “persistently hazardous” rental properties.

The identification of such properties, at the state agency level, will create a centralized data set for targeted enforcement and other interventions that does not currently exist and has been sorely needed. Similarly, HB 1218 requires the State to create a process to identify predatory landlord practices.

The bill mandates a plan that determines appropriate benchmarks for mitigation of dangerous conditions, financial penalties, and legal actions. DHCD and OAG are tasked, under the bill, to recommend statutory reforms that “provide effective mitigation and relief for tenants.”

Operating throughout 24 jurisdictions, Maryland Legal Aid works in collaboration with individual renters, tenant associations, local housing agencies, and DHCD to find timely remedies for dangerous conditions and predatory management practices. HB 1218 reflects the reality that we see on the ground – in which no actors are fully equipped to tackle housing precarity on their own. For instance, in a recent case involving a failed heating system, Maryland Legal Aid represented individual renters, assisted formation of their tenant council, filed a multi-plaintiff Tenant Safety Act case against their landlord, and then consulted with the local housing agency and state DHCD to identify financing options for the landlord’s court-mandated repairs. And yet, the case demonstrated the absence of local-state alignment, communication, and resource-sharing that the renters needed to avoid a harshly cold winter and to achieve long-term stability. In absence of that, many of the residents simply moved out. HB 1218 offers the prospect that Maryland could connect the dots and materially reduce hardship among low-income renters living in substandard housing.

For these reasons, **we urge a favorable report on HB 1218.**

If you have any questions, please contact:

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