

Written Testimony in Support of HB0313

Landlord and Tenant – Residential Housing – Rental Applications and Tenant Screening Maryland General Assembly

My name is Micah, and I work daily with individuals and families navigating the rental housing market—many of whom are Housing Choice Voucher holders or low-income renters simply trying to secure stable housing. Through this work, I see firsthand how the rental application and screening process has become not just burdensome, but deeply exploitative.

HB0313 addresses practices that have become normalized, yet cause real and lasting harm.

Too often, prospective tenants are asked to submit application fees for units that are not actually available, not realistically attainable, or already earmarked for another applicant. For families who are already housing-insecure, these fees are not minor inconveniences—they represent grocery money, transit fare, childcare costs, or the ability to submit the *next* application when the first one inevitably goes nowhere.

The lack of transparency in this process creates a system where renters are expected to take all the financial risk, while landlords are held to little or no accountability.

I routinely work with clients who apply to multiple units, pay multiple application and screening fees, and receive little to no information in return. They are denied without explanation, ignored entirely, or left in limbo while time-sensitive housing opportunities pass them by. This is especially devastating for voucher holders who are operating under strict deadlines and risk losing their assistance altogether if they cannot secure housing in time.

HB0313 introduces something that should already be standard in any fair housing system: honesty, clarity, and basic procedural fairness.

By requiring landlords to disclose whether a unit is actually available, to provide written information before collecting fees, and to explain adverse decisions in writing, this bill restores balance to a process that currently operates almost entirely in favor of property owners. It ensures that renters are not paying for false hope, silence, or arbitrary decision-making.

Importantly, this bill also protects tenants from the misuse and retention of personal records. In a time where sensitive information is routinely collected—Social Security numbers, income documentation, credit histories—renters deserve assurance that their

data will not be stored, misused, or weaponized against them without transparency or accountability.

The current system disproportionately harms low-income renters, Black renters, elderly individuals, people with disabilities, and families relying on housing assistance. These are the same communities already facing higher barriers to housing, fewer available units, and tighter timelines. Allowing unchecked application and screening practices only compounds these inequities.

HB0313 does not prevent landlords from screening tenants. It does not impose unreasonable burdens. What it does is set clear expectations and guardrails so that screening practices are fair, transparent, and rooted in good faith.

At its core, this bill recognizes a simple truth: housing searches are not abstract transactions. They are deeply personal, high-stakes moments that determine whether families remain housed, become displaced, or fall deeper into instability. When the system allows renters to be repeatedly charged, misled, or dismissed without explanation, it fails in its most basic responsibility.

I urge you to support HB0313 and affirm that in Maryland, access to housing should not depend on who can afford to be taken advantage of the longest.