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SB 941: Department of Housing and Community Development - Severe Health and Safety Risk Properties - Intervention Plan

Hearing before the House Economic Matters Committee on April 2, 2025

Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm that stands with tenants to protect and expand their rights to safe, habitable, affordable, and non-discriminatory housing and their rights to fair and equal treatment by Maryland's landlord-tenant laws, courts, and agencies. The PJC actively works towards instigating systemic changes to establish a society founded on justice. PJC seeks the Committee's **Favorable report on SB 941** as it is a critical measure to finally holding bad acting landlords accountable.

Across the state, too many residential properties are repeatedly cited for severe and unhealthy conditions such as rodent infestations, bed bugs, safety issues, and major structural problems. These properties follow a harmful cycle where they are inspected and cited by local governments and housing agencies but continue to expose families to the same dangerous conditions. Safe and decent housing is a fundamental foundation for healthy families, thriving neighborhoods, and a strong state economy. Yet, without a coordinated statewide strategy, the dangers to a tenant's safety often go unidentified until it is too late.

This important legislation will require the Office of Tenant and Landlord Affairs (OTLA) in consultation with the Attorney General, to develop a statewide plan to identify residential properties that pose severe health and safety risks and to give clear criteria for identifying properties and effective interventions to address predatory, non-compliant, and negligent multi-unit rental properties across the state.

Under **SB 941**, the OTLA would have the power and ability to fine habitual violators, create a tenant rent escrow to hold rent from bad acting landlords, mandate pest eradication plans, relocate tenants, and/or file lawsuits against landlords for violations of habitability laws.

This thoughtful, data-driven approach will help Maryland protect vulnerable residents and reduce preventable injuries and illnesses caused by unsafe housing conditions. It will also assist local governments and community partners in aligning their efforts with statewide goals, improving inspection and enforcement processes, and ensuring that landlords are held accountable for basic habitability standards.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on **SB 941**.