

HB 1456 PJC Senate FAV.pdf

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Position: FAV



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HB 1456: Consumer Protection - Residential Property Advertisement - Ownership Verification

Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee on April 1, 2026

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 HB 1456** as it is a critical measure to ensure that we finally change the persistent underground rental fraud system that has victimized both Maryland tenants and landlords.

HB 1456 would require commercial entities that publish or advertise residential property listings to verify that the person offering a property for rent is either the legal owner or the authorized agent of the owner.

Where affordable housing is extremely rare and people are desperate to find housing, fraudulent scammers have taken advantage by breaking into vacant, empty, or renovated homes to post these properties online and defraud an unsuspecting renter into paying thousands of dollars to move. These scams often involve fake ads that mimic real properties, attractive below-market pricing, and stolen photographs that lure victims into sending deposits or personal information to bad actors. Nationwide data from the **Federal Trade Commission** shows that since 2020 nearly 65,000 rental scams have been reported, with about **\$65 million in losses**.¹ In the 12 months ending June 2025, about half of people reporting a rental scam said the fake listing began on Facebook, and 16% cited Craigslist as the origin of the fraudulent ad.²

PJC has directly represented many clients in Baltimore City who have been scammed online. **A former client, Ms. Jessica Legette, gave testimony last year in opposition to HB 164 which would have stripped her of her due process rights after she had been a victim of a rental scam. (Written Testimony Attached). In that testimony Ms. Legette told her story of responding to an ad for an available rental unit, only to find that she had been scammed into paying thousands of dollars to someone who didn't own the property. Ms. Legette is but one of many Maryland renters who have been duped in this manner.**

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²Id.

Property owners also suffer when their legitimate listings, renovated, or vacant properties are copied, manipulated, and reposted by bad actors. For property owners, it has been frustrating and costly when they find an unauthorized person in their home with a fake lease they unsuspectingly got from a scammer. **HB 1456** would ensure these incidences are remedied. Similar legislation, such as New York Assembly Bill A10669, reflects a broader legislative movement recognizing the need for online platform verification to protect consumers.

States Regularly Require Platform Verification in Comparable Contexts

Maryland is not breaking new ground by requiring verification. States already impose verification requirements in multiple contexts where fraud or public harm is a concern. Whether it be political advertising³ or age verification⁴, the Courts have found state laws that require online verification to not be a violation of the First Amendment and that regulations on "commercial speech", or advertisements in this case, are permissible because they advance a substantial government interest and are narrowly tailored.⁵

Verification is Technologically Feasible

Some Online rental platforms already use verification technology. Airbnb requires hosts to confirm identity through government-issued identification or facial recognition.⁶ Similarly, Zillow requires first-time posters to verify their phone number. If a posting is flagged, Zillow uses a verification portal to confirm its legitimacy.⁷ In the meantime, the listing is temporarily removed until verification is completed.⁸ By comparison, places like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist have no verification process and experience higher rates of fraudulent listings.⁹

By requiring platforms to verify ownership or agency before publishing rental information, **HB 1456** adds a level of due diligence that shifts the burden away from individual renters trying to differentiate between legitimate and fraudulent ads, as well as protecting property owners from unauthorized occupants. It also improves accountability for the platforms where these harmful listings appear.

The Public Justice Center urges a favorable report on HB 1456

³ *In Washington State v. META Platforms, Inc.*, 33 Wash. App. 2d 138,560 P.3d 217 (2024) (imposing a \$25 million penalty for Meta's failure to comply with state political advertising disclosure requirements from 2018-2021; holding the law constitutional), review pending.

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⁷ *Zillow Rental Manager Account Verification*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/miicles/4038881116179-Zillow-Rental-Manager-Account-Verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁸ *Creating a Listing*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/32915356424595-Creating-a-Listing?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); *What is a Verified Source listing?*, Zillow: Renter FAQs, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/miicles/216368218-What-is-a-Verified-Source-listing#:text=Verified%20Source%20indicates%20the%20listing.the%20most%20common%20red%20flags> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁹ *Powell & Co. Property Management LTD, Which is better? Rental Agency or Facebook Market Place*, <https://powellandco.nz/which-is-better-rental-agency-or-facebook-market-place#:text=Some%20risks%20associated%20with%20using%20Facebook%20Marketplace.arranged%20through%20Facebook%20Marketplace%20poses%20safety%20risks> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); Better Business Bureau, *Is That Rental Listing Real? BBB Study*, <https://www.bbb.org/all/scamstudies/is-that-rental-listing-real-scam/is-that-rental-listing-real-full-study#:text=Though%20news%20classified%20ads%20have%20had%20no%20more%20problems>. (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); Lethub, *Spotting and Preventing Lockbox Rental Scams*, <https://www.lethub.co/blog/lockbox-rental-scams#:text=FAQs%20Which%20sites%20are%20known%20for%20most.anyone%20can%20post%20listings%20without%20much%20verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

TESTIMONY

My name is Jessica Legette **and I am asking for an unfavorable report on HB 164.** I am a Baltimore City resident and a mother of 3. During the pandemic, I asked my landlord to fix some lead issues that were on the property. Instead, the landlord retaliated against me and kicked me out. I was left to scramble for a new place to live. Moving in a short period of time put my family in a tight spot financially. I was so relieved when I found a place within my budget, especially because the landlord told me I could move in right away.

Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of my trauma. Right after moving in, random individuals started coming to my place, saying they owned the property and wanted me to leave. None of them told me who they were or showed me any proof or paperwork. It was a scary and confusing time. I did not know who to trust. I realized that the person who rented me the house never owned it and had scammed me out of a few thousand dollars.

It will take a long time for my family to recover from the anguish we experienced during this time. My kids are suffering at school. My oldest can't sleep through the night. I have been diagnosed with PTSD.

The only thing that helped was getting legal advice that assured me that I had a right to a court process. This helped me understand that the aggressive strangers who kept coming to my door weren't entitled to throw me out at any moment. I soon faced a wrongful detainer case. The actual owner had to prove who he was, and the court process allowed me to understand how much time I had before I would have to move out. The Judge gave me some clarity about what was going on and little time to move out. That little time was crucial for me.

For the company that owned this property and many others, the house was an investment to be checked on every couple of months. For me, it was a home that would help my family get stable again. I never intended to squat in someone else's property. The city had issued this property a vacant building notice years before. I wish the owner had boarded it up like the city ordered in 2022. Then, I never would have fallen victim to this scam.

If HB 164 had passed, a Sheriff would have kicked me out into the streets without any time to gather my belongings or find alternative housing. That is terrifying. **We should not be punishing victims such as myself.**

HB 1456- Baltimore Renters United.pdf

Uploaded by: Baltimore Renters United

Position: FAV



HB 1456 - Consumer Protection — Residential Property Advertisement — Ownership Verification

**Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee,
April 1, 2026**

Position: FAVORABLE

Hello, My name is Detrese Dowridge and I'm the Executive Director with [Baltimore Renters United](#) also known as BRU. BRU is a tenant led organization and through direct action and political education, we organize to build tenant power. When we see housing injustice we demand accountability and transparency from all appropriate institutions and government structures. Together, we are building a movement to transform Baltimore's housing system so that housing is treated as a human right, not a privilege.

We support HB 1456 as a critical measure to address persistent underground rental fraud schemes that have hurt both Maryland property owners and tenants.

My daily work involves interacting with tenants. In this role, I have encountered individuals who have suffered significant hardship after being misled by scammers who rented properties under false pretenses. In such cases, tenants often have little to no recourse or protection. I myself have seen these scams on social media platforms and have alerted tenants to be careful and what to look out for so they won't fall prey to scammers.

HB 1456 would require commercial platforms that publish or advertise residential property for rent to verify that the person offering the property for rent is 1) the legal owner, 2) the authorized agent of the owner, or 3) selling the property pursuant to Maryland law (foreclosure, tax sale, etc). Property advertised for rent or sale by a licensed realtor or broker is exempt.

Fraudulent scammers have taken advantage of people desperate to find increasingly rare affordable housing. These scammers break into vacant homes, change the locks, post these properties for rent online, and defraud an unsuspecting renter into paying thousands of dollars to move in. These scams often involve fake ads that look real, below-market pricing, and stolen photographs that lure victims into sending deposits to bad actors. Nationwide data from the Federal Trade Commission shows that since 2020 nearly *65,000 rental scams have been reported*, with \$65 million in losses.¹

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These “scamlord” listings frequently originate on widely used platforms, including social media and online marketplaces, and the scammers often disappear once a victim’s money is received. In the 12 months ending June 2025, about half of the people reporting a rental scam said the fake listing began on Facebook, and 16% cited Craigslist as the origin of the fraudulent ad.²

Property owners also suffer when their listings for vacant properties are copied, manipulated, and reposted by bad actors. For property owners, it is very costly to find an unauthorized person in their home with a fake lease that the resident believes is legitimate. HB 1456 would address these concerns by requiring the online platform to verify in a commercially reasonable manner that the person posting the property for rent is authorized to do so. Similar legislation, such as New York Assembly Bill A10669, reflects a broader legislative movement recognizing the need for online platform verification to protect consumers.

States Regularly Require Platform Verification in Comparable Contexts

Maryland is not breaking new ground by requiring verification. States already impose verification requirements in multiple contexts where fraud or public harm is a concern. Whether it be political advertising³ or age verification,⁴ the Courts have upheld state laws that require online verification from challenges under the First Amendment. These laws regulate the operation of the online platform for “commercial speech” and advance a substantial government interest.⁵

Verification is Technologically Feasible

Some online rental platforms already use verification technology. Airbnb requires hosts to confirm identity through government-issued identification or facial recognition.⁶ Similarly, Zillow requires first-time posters to verify their phone number. If a posting is flagged, Zillow uses a verification portal to confirm its legitimacy.⁷ In the meantime, the listing is temporarily

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⁶ *Verifying Your Identity on Airbnb*, Airbnb Help Center: Verifying your identity on Airbnb, <https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/1237?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

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removed until verification is completed.⁸ By comparison, entities like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist have no verification process and experience higher rates of fraudulent listings.⁹

By requiring platforms to verify authorization before publishing a rental ad, HB 1456 adds a level of due diligence that shifts the burden of detecting fraud away from individual renters. It also protects property owners from unauthorized occupants and improves accountability for the platforms where these fraudulent listings appear.

We urge a favorable report on HB 1456.

Thanks for understanding and please feel free to reach out to Detrese Dowridge at detresedowridge@bmorerentersunited.org if you have any questions.

⁸ *Creating a Listing*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/32915356424595-Creating-a-Listing?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); *What is a Verified Source listing?*, Zillow: Renter FAQs, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/216368218-What-is-a-Verified-Source-listing#:~:text=Verified%20Source%20indicates%20the%20listing,the%20most%20common%20red%20flags> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

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HB 1456 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Chelsea Ortega

Position: FAV



SANTONI, VOCCI & ORTEGA LLC

HB 1456 - Consumer Protection — Residential Property Advertisement — Ownership Verification

**Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee,
April 1, 2026**

Position: FAVORABLE

Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC is a private tenants' rights and consumer protection firm representing tenants in a variety of matters.

We support HB 1456 as a critical measure to address persistent underground rental fraud schemes that have hurt both Maryland property owners and tenants.

HB 1456 would require commercial platforms that publish or advertise residential property for rent to verify that the person offering the property for rent is 1) the legal owner, 2) the authorized agent of the owner, or 3) selling the property pursuant to Maryland law (foreclosure, tax sale, etc). Property advertised for rent or sale by a licensed realtor or broker is exempt.

Amendments adopted by the Economic Matters Committee fully addressed the concerns of the Maryland Realtors and the Bankers, and there is no known opposition to the bill.

Fraudulent scammers have taken advantage of people desperate to find increasingly rare affordable housing. These scammers break into vacant homes, change the locks, post these properties for rent online, and defraud an unsuspecting renter into paying thousands of dollars to move in. These scams often involve fake ads that look real, below-market pricing, and stolen photographs that lure victims into sending deposits to bad actors. Nationwide data from the Federal Trade Commission shows that since 2020 nearly 65,000 rental scams have been reported, with \$65 million in losses.¹

These “scamlord” listings frequently originate on widely used platforms, including social media and online marketplaces, and the scammers often disappear once a victim’s money is received. In the 12 months ending June 2025, about half of the people reporting a rental scam said the fake listing began on Facebook, and 16% cited Craigslist as the origin of the fraudulent ad.²

Property owners also suffer when their listings for vacant properties are copied, manipulated, and reposted by bad actors. For property owners, it is very costly to find an unauthorized person in their home with a fake lease that the resident believes is legitimate. HB 1456 would address these concerns by requiring the online platform to verify in a commercially reasonable manner that the person posting the property for rent is authorized to do so. Similar legislation, such as New York

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² *Id.*

Assembly Bill A10669, reflects a broader legislative movement recognizing the need for online platform verification to protect consumers.

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By requiring platforms to verify authorization before publishing a rental ad, HB 1456 adds a level of due diligence that shifts the burden of detecting a fraud away from individual renters. It also protects property owners from unauthorized occupants and improves accountability for the platforms where these fraudulent listings appear. **We urge a favorable report on HB 1456.**

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HB1456_MBA_FAV

Uploaded by: Evan Richards

Position: FAV



HB 1456 – Consumer Protection - Residential Property Advertisement - Ownership Verification

Committee: Senate Finance Committee

Date: April 1, 2026

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Bankers Association (MBA) **SUPPORTS** HB 1456. This legislation, as amended, requires online platforms and other commercial advertisers to verify that anyone listing a Maryland residential property for sale or rent has legal authority to do so, mandates record-keeping and takedowns for violations, and treats noncompliance as a violation of the Maryland Consumer Protection Act.

MBA appreciates the bill sponsor's willingness to adopt a House floor amendment expressly authorizing residential property being sold by an entity exercising a legal remedy to sell to be listed. Absent this amendment, banks seeking to dispose of foreclosed properties would have been effectively barred from advertising those properties for sale.

Accordingly, MBA urges the issuance of a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 1456.

The Maryland Bankers Association (MBA) represents FDIC-insured community, regional, and national banks, employing thousands of Marylanders and holding \$194.8 billion in deposits in over 1,100 branches across our State. The Maryland banking industry serves customers across the State and provides an array of financial services including residential mortgage lending, business banking, estates and trust services, consumer banking, and more.

CPSR HB1456 renters.pdf

Uploaded by: Gwen DuBois

Position: FAV



HB 1456 - Consumer Protection — Residential Property Advertisement — Ownership Verification

**Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee,
April 1, 2026**

Position: FAVORABLE

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (CPSR), an organization founded by physicians with over 800 supporters, support HB 1456 because it would legislate protections for renters from being victims of fraudulent rentals. Though our mission is to address the greatest public health threats of all, nuclear war and climate change, we are also committed locally to support social determinants of health of which housing is a very important one.

We support HB 1456 as a critical measure to address persistent underground rental fraud schemes that have hurt both Maryland property owners and renters.

Renters who are caught up in fraudulent attempts to rent property are at risk of losing their housing, property and money set aside for housing. This can lead to a cascade of emotional and physical problems that eventually impact health and wellness of our patients. It can be prevented and legislation like HB 1456 is an attempt to prevent fraudulent rentals and protect our patients.

HB 1456 would require commercial platforms that publish or advertise residential property for rent to verify that the person offering the property for rent is 1) the legal owner, 2) the authorized agent of the owner, or 3) selling the property pursuant to Maryland law (foreclosure, tax sale, etc). Property advertised for rent or sale by a licensed realtor or broker is exempt.

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victims into sending deposits to bad actors. Nationwide data from the Federal Trade Commission shows that since 2020 nearly *65,000 rental scams have been reported*, with \$65 million in losses.¹

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Housing is Health!!

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility urges a favorable report on HB1456.

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HB1456_fav_EconAction_cross.pdf

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Position: FAV



**HB1456: Consumer Protection - Residential Property Advertisement -
Ownership Verification**

Position: Favorable

April 1, 2026

The Honorable Pam Beidle, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Members, Senate Finance

Chair Beidle and Members of the Committee,

Economic Action Maryland Fund urges a favorable report on HB1456, which would protect tenants and landlords from pervasive online rental scams. We support the amendments that were added in the House, which make it easier for licensed real estate agents to easily verify their posts.

Online tools such as Craigslist or Facebook have become a common way for renters to find affordable rental housing. With the extreme shortage of affordable rental housing in Maryland, tenants are often committing to rental units from an online site without viewing the unit, paying their deposit and first month's rent sight unseen.

The use of online tools for rental listings can make it easier for landlords and tenants, but it also comes with the risks of fraud or abuse that exist with any online transaction. A scammer can take pictures off a legitimate listing or a vacant house and post the unit as their own property on these sites. They then take advantage of renters who are desperate to find an affordable unit and trap them in a fraudulent lease for a unit that does belong to the scammer. This hurts tenants, who lose any money they put down, and hurts landlords, whose units are being listed fraudulently on these sites.

Online rental scams are sadly not a rare occurrence. Nationwide, Federal Trade Commission data shows that since 2020 nearly 65,000 rental scams have been reported, with about \$65 million in losses.¹ From June 2024 - June 2025, about half the people reporting a rental scam said the listing was posted on Facebook, and another 16% said the listing was on Craigslist.

¹ Rental Scams hit home with \$65 million in reported losses, Consumer Protection Data Spotlight, FED. TRADE COMM'N (Dec. 22, 3035)

<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/data-visualizations/data-spotlight/2025/12/rental-scams-hit-home-65-million-reported-losses?>

Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.



Verification is easy and already used by other online entities. Tools such as Airbnb and Zillow have verification systems in place. Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace have no verification requirements, opening the door to these rental scams.

HB1456 would establish basic, common-sense guardrails to protect renters and landlords from online rental scams, and we urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Bevan-Dangel
Deputy Director

Economic Action (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) champions economic rights and housing justice through advocacy, research, consumer education, and direct service. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

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HB 1456_MD Center on Economic Policy_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kali Schumitz

Position: FAV



APRIL 1, 2026

Basic Verification Procedures Would Protect Marylanders From Rental Scams

Position Statement Favorable for House Bill 1456

Given before the Senate Finance Committee

Persistent underground rental fraud schemes that have hurt both Maryland property owners and tenants. HB 1456 would help prevent such scams by requiring commercial platforms that publish or advertise residential property for rent to verify that the person offering the property for rent is the legal owner, the authorized agent of the owner, or selling the property pursuant to Maryland law (such as in a foreclosure or tax sale). Property advertised for rent or sale by a licensed Realtor or broker is exempt. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Finance Committee issue a favorable report for HB 1456.**

Amendments adopted by the Economic Matters Committee fully addressed the concerns of the Maryland Realtors and the bankers, and there is no known opposition to the bill.

Fraudulent scammers have taken advantage of people desperate to find increasingly rare affordable housing. These scammers break into vacant homes, change the locks, post these properties for rent online, and defraud an unsuspecting renter into paying thousands of dollars to move in. These scams often involve fake ads that look real, below-market pricing, and stolen photographs that lure victims into sending deposits to bad actors. Nearly 65,000 rental scams have been reported nationwide since 2020, with \$65 million in losses, according to the Federal Trade Commission.ⁱ

These “scamlord” listings frequently originate on widely used platforms, including social media and online marketplaces, and the scammers often disappear once a victim’s money is received. In the 12 months ending June 2025, about half of the people reporting a rental scam said the fake listing began on Facebook, and 16% cited Craigslist as the origin of the fraudulent ad.ⁱⁱ

Property owners also suffer when their listings for vacant properties are copied, manipulated, and reposted by bad actors. For property owners, it is very costly to find an unauthorized person in their home with a fake lease that the resident believes is legitimate. HB 1456 would address these concerns by requiring the online platform to verify in a commercially reasonable manner that the person posting the property for rent is authorized to do so. Similar legislation, such as New York Assembly Bill A10669, reflects a broader legislative movement recognizing the need for online platform verification to protect consumers.

States Regularly Require Platform Verification in Comparable Contexts

Maryland is not breaking new ground by requiring verification. States already impose verification requirements in multiple contexts where fraud or public harm is a concern. Whether it be political advertisingⁱⁱⁱ or age verification,^{iv} courts have upheld state laws that require online verification from challenges under the First Amendment.

Verification is Technologically Feasible

Some online rental platforms already use verification technology. Airbnb requires hosts to confirm identity through government-issued identification or facial recognition.^v Similarly, Zillow requires first-time posters to verify their phone number. If a posting is flagged, Zillow uses a verification portal to confirm its legitimacy.^{vi} In the meantime, the listing is temporarily removed until verification is completed.^{vii} By comparison, entities like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist have no verification process and experience higher rates of fraudulent listings.^{viii}

By requiring platforms to verify authorization before publishing a rental ad, HB 1456 adds a level of due diligence that shifts the burden of detecting a fraud away from individual renters. It also protects property owners from unauthorized occupants and improves accountability for the platforms where these fraudulent listings appear. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1456.**

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 1456

Bill summary

HB 1456 requires online platforms that advertise residential rental properties to verify that the person listing the property is the legal owner, an authorized agent, or otherwise permitted to rent the property under Maryland law. This adds a layer of accountability to prevent fraudulent rental listings.

Background

Rental fraud has become increasingly common, with scammers exploiting tight housing markets by posting fake listings, collecting deposits, and disappearing. Nationally, tens of thousands of rental scams have been reported in recent years, resulting in millions in losses. Many of these scams originate on widely used platforms like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist, which currently lack verification requirements. Other platforms, such as Airbnb and Zillow, already use verification tools, demonstrating that compliance is feasible. Similar legislation in other states reflects a growing trend to regulate online platforms to prevent consumer harm.

Equity Implications

Black and Brown renters—who are more likely to face housing instability and limited access to safe, affordable housing—are disproportionately targeted by rental scams. These communities are often navigating urgent housing needs, making them more vulnerable to deceptive listings and financial exploitation. HB 1456 shifts the burden of detecting fraud away from renters and places responsibility on platforms, helping prevent financial loss, displacement, and housing instability. By reducing exposure to predatory scams, this bill promotes greater housing security and equity in an already unequal rental market.

Impact

House Bill 1456 will likely **increase racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱRental Scams hit home with \$65 million in reported losses, Consumer Protection Data Spotlight, FED. TRADE COMM’N (Dec. 22, 3035) <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/data-visualizations/data-spotlight/2025/12/rental-scams-hit-home-65-million-reported-losses?>

ⁱⁱ *Id.*

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- iii *In Washington State v. META Platforms, Inc.*, 33 Wash. App. 2d 138, 560 P.3d 217 (2024) (imposing a \$25 million penalty for Meta’s failure to comply with state political advertising disclosure requirements from 2018–2021; holding the law constitutional), review pending.
- iv *Free Speech Coalition, Inc. v. Paxton*, 606 U.S. 461, 145 S. Ct. 2291 (2025).
- v *Verifying Your Identity on Airbnb*, Airbnb Help Center: Verifying your identity on Airbnb, <https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/1237?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).
- vi *Zillow Rental Manager Account Verification*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/40388811116179-Zillow-Rental-Manager-Account-Verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).
- vii *Creating a Listing*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/32915356424595-Creating-a-Listing?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); *What is a Verified Source listing?*, Zillow: Renter FAQs, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/216368218-What-is-a-Verified-Source-listing#:~:text=Verified%20Source%20indicates%20the%20listing,the%20most%20common%20red%20flags> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).
- viii Powell & Co. Property Management LTD, *Which is better? Rental Agency or Facebook Market Place*, <https://powellandco.nz/which-is-better-rental-agency-or-facebook-market-place#:~:text=Some%20risks%20associated%20with%20using%20Facebook%20Marketplace,arranged%20through%20Facebook%20Marketplace%20poses%20safety%20risks> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); Better Business Bureau, *Is That Rental Listing Real? BBB Study*, <https://www.bbb.org/all/scamstudies/is-that-rental-listing-real-scam/is-that-rental-listing-real-full-study#:~:text=Though%20newspaper%20classified%20ads%20have,he%20had%20no%20more%20problems>, (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); Lethub, *Spotting and Preventing Lockbox Rental Scams*, <https://www.lethub.co/blog/lockbox-rental-scams#:~:text=FAQs%20Which%20sites%20are%20known%20for%20most,anyone%20can%20post%20listings%20without%20much%20verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

HB 1456 - Written Testimony - PBRC - FAV - SENATE.

Uploaded by: Katherine Davis

Position: FAV



HB 1456 - Consumer Protection — Residential Property Advertisement — Ownership Verification

Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee

April 1, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

The Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (“PBRC”), an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the statewide thought leader and clearinghouse for pro bono civil legal services in Maryland. As the designated pro bono arm of the MSBA, PBRC provides training, mentorship, and pro bono service opportunities to members of the private bar and offers direct legal services to over 5,000 clients annually.

In May 2017, with a grant from the Maryland Judiciary’s Access to Justice Department, PBRC launched the Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day (TVLD) Program, now called the Tenant Justice Program (TJP), in Baltimore City Rent Court to provide day-of-court legal representation to tenants. Since then, this continually expanding Program has allowed PBRC staff and volunteer attorneys to represent thousands of tenants in both Baltimore City and Baltimore County in multiple types of legal actions that could result in eviction. An overarching goal of this Program is to promote and preserve stable housing for low-income tenants in Maryland, and we believe that HB 1456 is a critical measure to do just that.

Through our work we often represent clients and receive calls on our hotline from Marylanders who have been victimized by rental fraud. Typically, they contact us after being served with a wrongful detainer action and learning that they have been paying rent to someone who does not own the property. They have a court date and are at risk of eviction. While we will often accept these cases, we recognize that, if the family is indeed a victim of a rental scam, we may be limited in our ability to help them stay housed because they have no legal right to remain in the property. In these cases, we try to negotiate settlements with the owners to allow our clients time to find alternative housing and avoid the trauma of an eviction.

Where affordable housing is extremely rare and people are desperate to find housing, fraudulent scammers have taken advantage by breaking into vacant, empty, or renovated homes to post these properties online and defraud an unsuspecting renter into paying thousands of dollars to move. **HB 1456 would reduce the prevalence of these rental scams by requiring commercial entities that publish or advertise residential property listings to verify that the person offering a property for rent is either the legal owner or the authorized agent of the owner. Amendments adopted by the Economic Matters Committee fully addressed the concerns of the Maryland Realtors and the Bankers, and there is no known opposition to the bill.**

We recently represented a mother of four who had fallen prey to such a scam. She is a medical tech at an OBGYN office who had found a home on Facebook Marketplace that was in a good school district and suitable for her family. She paid a security deposit equal to two months’ rent and met the alleged owner at the property to get the keys and sign the lease before moving in. After she moved in, she used the lease and utility bills to register her children in the local school and continued to pay rent monthly. The actual owner didn’t realize that anyone was living in the home for six months, at which point he filed a wrongful detainer to evict her and her family. Our client was shocked to find out that her lease

was a fraud. Luckily, she was able to come to court and obtain legal help. We negotiated a settlement wherein she has until April 1, 2026 to move out and avoid an eviction.

We recognize that there were two victims in our case, and HB 1456 would help both renters and owners by reducing the chances of similar things happening to others.

States Regularly Require Platform Verification in Comparable Contexts

Maryland is not breaking new ground by requiring verification. States already impose verification requirements in multiple contexts where fraud or public harm is a concern. Whether it be political advertising¹ or age verification,² the Courts have found state laws that require online verification to not be a violation of the First Amendment and that regulations on “commercial speech”, or advertisements in this case, are permissible because they advance a substantial government interest and are narrowly tailored.³

Verification is Technologically Feasible

Some Online rental platforms already use verification technology. Airbnb requires hosts to confirm identity through government-issued identification or facial recognition.⁴ Similarly, Zillow requires first-time posters to verify their phone number. If a posting is flagged, Zillow uses a verification portal to confirm its legitimacy.⁵ In the meantime, the listing is temporarily removed until verification is completed.⁶ By comparison, places like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist have no verification process and experience higher rates of fraudulent listings.⁷

By requiring platforms to verify ownership or agency before publishing rental information, HB 1456 adds a level of due diligence that shifts the burden away from individual renters trying to differentiate between legitimate and fraudulent

¹ *In Washington State v. META Platforms, Inc.*, 33 Wash. App. 2d 138, 560 P.3d 217 (2024) (imposing a \$25 million penalty for Meta’s failure to comply with state political advertising disclosure requirements from 2018–2021; holding the law constitutional), review pending.

² *Free Speech Coalition, Inc. v. Paxton*, 606 U.S. 461, 145 S. Ct. 2291 (2025).

³ *United States v. O’ Brien*, 391 U.S. 367 (1968); *Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. v. Public Service*, 447 U.S. 557 (1980).

⁴ *Verifying Your Identity on Airbnb*, Airbnb Help Center: Verifying your identity on Airbnb, <https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/1237?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁵ *Zillow Rental Manager Account Verification*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/4038881116179-Zillow-Rental-Manager-Account-Verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁶ *Creating a Listing*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/32915356424595-Creating-a-Listing?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); *What is a Verified Source listing?*, Zillow: Renter FAQs, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/216368218-What-is-a-Verified-Source-listing#:~:text=Verified%20Source%20indicates%20the%20listing,the%20most%20common%20red%20flags> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁷ *Powell & Co. Property Management LTD, Which is better? Rental Agency or Facebook Market Place*,

<https://powellandco.nz/which-is-better-rental-agency-or-facebook-market-place#:~:text=Some%20risks%20associated%20with%20using%20Facebook%20Marketplace,arranged%20through%20Facebook%20Marketplace%20poses%20safety%20risks> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026);

Better Business Bureau, Is That Rental Listing Real? BBB Study, https://www.bbb.org/all/scamstudies/is_that_rental_listing_real_scam/is_that_rental_listing_real_full_study#:~:text=Though%20newspaper%20classified%20ads%20have,he%20had%20no%20more%20problems. (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); *Lethub, Spotting and Preventing Lockbox Rental Scams*, <https://www.lethub.co/blog/lockbox-rental-scams#:~:text=FAQs%20Which%20sites%20are%20known%20for%20most,anyone%20can%20post%20listings%20without%20much%20verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

ads, as well as protecting property owners from unauthorized occupants. It also improves accountability for the platforms where these harmful listings appear.

For the above reasons,

PBRC urges a FAVORABLE report on HB 1456.

Please contact Katherine Davis, Director of PBRC's Courtroom Advocacy Project, with any questions.

kdavis@probonomd.org • 443-703-3049

HB 1456_Crossover_Consumer Protection Division_Sup

Uploaded by: Kira Wilpone-Welborn

Position: FAV

CAROLYN A. QUATTROCKI
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LEONARD J. HOWIE III
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Deputy Attorney General

ZENITA WICKHAM HURLEY
Deputy Attorney General



**STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
HOUSING UNIT**

ANTHONY G. BROWN
Attorney General

WILLIAM D. GRUHN
Division Chief

KAREN M. VALENTINE
Deputy Division Chief

PETER V. BERNS
General Counsel

CHRISTIAN E. BARRERA
Chief of Staff

KIRA WILPONE-WELBORN
Unit Chief

March 30, 2026

To: The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Finance Committee

From: Kira Wilpone-Welborn, Assistant Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division

Re: House Bill 1456 – Consumer Protection - Residential Property Advertisement -
Ownership Verification (Support)

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General (the “Division”) supports House Bill 1456 sponsored by Delegates Embry, Boyce, Lehman, and Wu. House Bill 1456 simply requires entities that advertise rental properties to the public to verify that the advertisement is being offered by the owner or an agent of the owner.

Increasingly, scam artists are using third party listing sites to post fake advertisements for rental properties.¹ These fake advertisements lure unsuspecting consumers into seeking to rent units that are not available. Often, consumers then expend significant amounts of money in “rent” and “security deposits” for a unit that they will not be able to occupy. Indeed, the Division has received complaints from consumers who have paid money to scammers and then were forced to scramble to find alternative housing.

These practices harm consumers both financially and through the possibility of identity theft after they have provided sensitive information including full names, birth dates, and sometimes Social Security Numbers. House Bill 1456’s requirement that the entity hosting the advertisement confirm the offer is from the owner or agent would assist in disrupting these scams before they reach vulnerable consumers.

¹ See Federal Trade Commission, Rental Listing Scams, <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/rental-listing-scams>.

For these reasons, the Division recommends the Finance Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 1456.

cc: The Honorable Elizabeth Embry, *et al.*
Members, Finance Committee

HB 1456X - Property Advertisement - FAV - REALTORS

Uploaded by: Lisa May

Position: FAV



House Bill 1456 - Consumer Protection - Residential Property Advertisement - Ownership Verification

Position: Support as Amended

Maryland REALTORS® supports the General Assembly's efforts to combat real estate fraud and protect consumers from deceptive schemes in which properties are advertised without the owner's knowledge or consent. These scams are increasingly common and can cause significant financial harm to potential home buyers and renters alike.

As originally drafted, HB 1456 raised concerns about unintended consequences for legitimate real estate activity. It did not clearly limit its scope to Maryland properties, potentially subjecting companies to verification requirements for listings nationwide. It also failed to reflect how listings are distributed today, where a single entry in a multiple listing service (MLS) can be shared across many platforms. Requiring each platform to independently verify ownership of the same advertisement would be duplicative, burdensome, and could reduce listing availability.

House amendments addressed these issues by limiting the bill's scope to properties located in Maryland and distinguishing between listings from licensed real estate professionals and unverified sources. Maryland regulations already require written owner authorization before real estate licensees may advertise a property, as well as review and approval from the licensee's broker.

The amended bill also removes the need to reverify ownership when approved listings are shared with third-party sites via the MLS, avoiding tens or hundreds of thousands of unnecessary verifications. This approach preserves the bill's consumer protection goals without disrupting the real estate market.

Maryland REALTORS® greatly appreciates the sponsor's collaboration on these provisions and respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 1456 as amended.

**For more information contact lisa.may@mdrealtor.org
or christa.mcgee@mdrealtor.org**

HB 1456 Crossover - CLS Support - Property Ownersh

Uploaded by: Lisa Sarro

Position: FAV



Jessica A. Quincosa, Esq.
Executive Director

Kayla Williams-Campbell, Esq.
Deputy Director

Lisa Sarro, Esq.
Director of Litigation &
Advocacy

**HB 1456 – Consumer Protection — Residential Property
Advertisement — Ownership Verification**

Hearing before the Finance Committee
April 1, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

To the Honorable Members of the Finance Committee:

[Community Legal Services](#) (CLS) is a nonprofit legal services organization that provides free legal services to income-eligible Marylanders. CLS is a designated Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) provider, through which CLS has assisted thousands of tenants in housing matters, with a goal of helping our clients access and maintain housing stability. **We urge a favorable report on House Bill 1456 to help prevent individuals and families searching for a place to live from falling prey to an all-too-common rental property scam.**

In addition to assisting clients with landlord tenant matters, CLS also has a substantial family law and domestic violence practice. **Our clients often face significant barriers when they are forced to find alternative living situations**, especially since they often must find something new quickly. Some are forced out of their current housing situation by eviction or unsafe property conditions, and others are forced out due to domestic violence or other family/roommate issues. Many who find themselves in this situation have **poor credit** reports, or **minimal or negative rental histories**, and may have **criminal records**. Many are **young, with minimal to no credit or rental histories**. All these factors can make getting accepted for new housing nearly impossible, and **this is where fraudsters step in, taking advantage of people who are desperate to get a roof over their heads and have very few options.**

Here's how it commonly works: scammers find and break into a home where no one appears to be living. Often they are completely empty, and they appear for all intents and purposes to be waiting for a new tenant. They take pictures and post them online in a "For Rent" ad. Upon inquiry by a prospective tenant, they may provide an address and have the person making the inquiry go by to take a look. Sometimes, they don't even do that – creating "phantom listings," they simply post stolen pictures, claiming they depict the property the scammer has listed for rent, and then they simply move forward with the "rental agreement" before the prospective tenant has even seen the property in person. The ad will list a below-market rent amount or possibly offer an incentive of a sixth month free (something they will likely never have to make good on because the truth that they do not own the property may come to light before that time passes). Regardless of the promises, the goal is to get an unsuspecting prospective tenant to pay them the most money possible up front in order to move in.

Once they have locked in the new tenant's agreement (aka, the "mark's" agreement) to rent the property, the mark is told to pay via electronic transfer for the security deposit, first month's rent, and any other charges the scammer can pile on without losing the mark's willingness to complete the deal. The boldest scammers will actually provide keys and **demand rent from the unsuspecting tenants until the true ownership of the property comes to light**. In other instances, the money paid by the tenant is long gone as soon as it's transferred, and they **never even make it into what they believed would be their new home**.

This is, of course, **also a fraud perpetrated on the true owner** of the property, for whom it can be distressing, at the least, to find occupants living in their property, and costly in terms of time and money as well, if they are forced to use legal means to remove the defrauded "tenants" from their property.

HB 1456 takes aim at preventing these scams, which very frequently originate on widely used platforms, including social media and online marketplaces, and the scammers often disappear once the money is sent. In its [December 22, 2025 Consumer Protection Data Spotlight](#), titled "Rental Scams Hit Home With \$65 Million in Reported Losses," the Federal Trade Commission reported that in the 12 months ending June 2025, about **half of people reporting a rental scam said the fake listing began on Facebook; 16% cited Craigslist as the origin of the fraudulent ad**.

HB 1456 would require online platforms to verify ownership or a legal right to rent a property before they publish rental information, adding a level of responsibility to those platforms that currently does not exist for the consumer matter they allow to be distributed. It provides consumers with a better chance to differentiate between legitimate and fraudulent ads and also protects property owners from having their properties rented out from under them. This is **not a new concept** in the consumer protection realm, nor is new technologically. The **platforms have the capability** to engage in this level of due diligence. They just choose not to. HB 1456 would make it a requirement and thereby **provide a much-needed level of protection for Marylanders at a time when they are particularly vulnerable to the bad actions and intent of scammers**.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1456. Please feel free to reach out to Lisa Marie Sarro, Esq., at Sarro@clspgc.org with any questions.

2026 HB 1456 - xover - FIN - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicholas Blendy

Position: FAV

Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

Samuel Cogen, Sheriff

Main Office
The Clarence Mitchell Courthouse
100 N. Calvert Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Phone: 410-396-1155
Fax: 410-727-3507



District Court Office
111 N. Calvert Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Phone: 410-396-7412
Fax: 410-396-7439

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nicholas T.R. Blendy, Esq., Assistant Sheriff, Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

RE: House Bill 1456 – Consumer Protection - Residential Property Advertisement - Ownership Verification

DATE: April 1, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Sheriff's Office (BCSO) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1456.

If enacted, HB 1456 prohibits a commercial entity (including a social media platform) from publishing or advertising information on residential property available for lease or sale on behalf of another unless the commercial entity verifies either: (1) the individual posting the publication or advertisement that they the legal owner of the property or (2) that the individual is an agent of the aforementioned legal owner. A commercial entity has to maintain the record of the verification for at least three (3) years. A commercial entity that publishes or advertises information in violation of the bill's requirement must promptly remove the publication or advertisement. Violation of the bill is an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice under the Maryland Consumer Protection Act (MCPA), subject to MCPA's civil and criminal penalty provisions.

The BCSO is the entity responsible for all court ordered evictions (via a District Court issued Warrant of Restitution) in Baltimore City. In calendar year 2024, the BCSO observed an abnormally high increase in wrongful detainer filings, which is the legal action that must be filed in order to have a court determine whether an individual is possessing real property without claim of right—including squatter cases. In conducting a review of specific cases, what the BCSO learned is that there appeared to be an increase in "dummy" or illegitimate leases being brandished by individuals who did not have a claim of right to a tenancy because the dummy lease was not authorized by the legal owner of the property or their agent. In some cases, these dummy leases may have been part of a dispute between the individual where they may have been involved in the creation of the lease, but in many other cases, we learned, the dummy lease was paid for via the person who thought they were paying for a tenancy, but

the reality was a third party bad actor had advertised the property and allegedly taken the money from the erstwhile prospective tenant who seems to have been operating in good faith.

After discussing this issue with the Assistant Attorney General assigned as counsel to the BCSO, as well as discussing the challenges and resources that need to be put into a criminal prosecution case with the local State's Attorney's Office and discussing this matter with tenant advocates, realtors, the public defender and other relevant partners, the BCSO has determined that pursuing new criminal penalties or enhancing the existing criminal penalties is not a thing we should advocate for more of. In short, if the goal is to prevent the action from occurring to protect the lawful owners of these properties as well as to protect prospective tenants from being defrauded in an online fraud scheme—which seems to be the anecdotal modus operandi of the situations we have investigated—what is the humane way forward to address this real problem we are seeing in Baltimore City?

Two things seem to be the best way to move forward. First, the General Assembly enacted and the Governor Chapter 188 (Senate Bill 46) of the Laws of Maryland of 2025, which created an expedited hearing process where wrongful detainer actions are required to be heard by a District Court judge in about as quick of a timeline as due process allows for—within 10 days of filing. This change has increased the amount of wrongful detainer actions we are seeing occur, which seems to be providing those individuals involved in these cases the opportunity to have a judge make a factual determination on the merits about the circumstances involved in these disputes.

The second is the idea behind HB 1456. By putting enhanced consumer protections and verifications around the mediums that individuals engage in the advertisement and publication of notice of potential real property for lease, this bill is designed to deter fraud schemes—often conducted by actors who are not even in the State of Maryland—from occurring in the first place. Moreover, by requiring a record be maintained by the commercial entity for three years, HB 1456 will aid local law enforcement, prosecutors, tenant advocate attorneys as well as attorneys for landlords, and judges with an electronic “paper trail” that should significantly aid in the factual determinations that need to be addressed in front of a judge in these, often very tense, disputes.

Best of all, HB 1456 is designed to positively impact the existing status quo in a way that creates no new crimes and enhances no existing criminal penalties—again, a very humane way to address a real and unique problem that primarily digital technology has made possible in the current landlord tenant law environment.

For the foregoing reasons, the BCSO respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 1456.

HB 1456 Consumer Protection - Property Ads - Owner

Uploaded by: Ray Nosbaum

Position: FAV

HB 1456 - Consumer Protection — Residential Property Advertisement — Ownership Verification

**Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee,
April 1, 2026**

Position: FAVORABLE

My name is Ray Nosbaum, and I am a member of the Long Branch Housing Action Team, which is a member of Renters United MD (RUM). I support HB 1456 as a critical measure to address persistent underground rental fraud schemes that have hurt both Maryland property owners and tenants.

This is important because Long Branch is a working class, mostly immigrant community, which makes so many residents susceptible to scams because they are not always familiar with business practices in the United States or may experience language barriers

HB 1456 would require commercial platforms that publish or advertise residential property for rent to verify that the person offering the property for rent is 1) the legal owner, 2) the authorized agent of the owner, or 3) selling the property pursuant to Maryland law (foreclosure, tax sale, etc). Property advertised for rent or sale by a licensed realtor or broker is exempt.

Amendments adopted by the Economic Matters Committee fully addressed the concerns of the Maryland Realtors and the Bankers, and there is no known opposition to the bill.

Fraudulent scammers have taken advantage of people desperate to find increasingly rare affordable housing. These scammers break into vacant homes, change the locks, post these properties for rent online, and defraud an unsuspecting renter into paying thousands of dollars to move in. These scams often involve fake ads that look real, below-market pricing, and stolen photographs that lure victims into sending deposits to bad actors. Nationwide data from the Federal Trade Commission shows that since 2020 nearly *65,000 rental scams have been reported*, with \$65 million in losses.¹

These “scamlord” listings frequently originate on widely used platforms, including social media and online marketplaces, and the scammers often disappear once a victim’s money is received. In the 12 months ending June 2025, about half of the people reporting a rental scam said the fake listing began on Facebook, and 16% cited Craigslist as the origin of the fraudulent ad.²

Property owners also suffer when their listings for vacant properties are copied, manipulated, and reposted by bad actors. For property owners, it is very costly to find an unauthorized person in their home with a fake lease that the resident believes is legitimate. HB 1456 would address these concerns by requiring the online platform to verify in a commercially reasonable manner that the

¹*Rental Scams hit home with \$65 million in reported losses*, Consumer Protection Data Spotlight, **FED. TRADE COMM’N** (Dec. 22, 3035) <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/data-visualizations/data-spotlight/2025/12/rental-scams-hit-home-65-million-reported-losses?>.

² *Id.*

person posting the property for rent is authorized to do so. Similar legislation, such as New York Assembly Bill A10669, reflects a broader legislative movement recognizing the need for online platform verification to protect consumers.

States Regularly Require Platform Verification in Comparable Contexts

Maryland is not breaking new ground by requiring verification. States already impose verification requirements in multiple contexts where fraud or public harm is a concern. Whether it be political advertising³ or age verification,⁴ the Courts have upheld state laws that require online verification from challenges under the First Amendment. These laws regulate the operation of the online platform for “commercial speech” and advance a substantial government interest.⁵

Verification is Technologically Feasible

Some online rental platforms already use verification technology. Airbnb requires hosts to confirm identity through government-issued identification or facial recognition.⁶ Similarly, Zillow requires first-time posters to verify their phone number. If a posting is flagged, Zillow uses a verification portal to confirm its legitimacy.⁷ In the meantime, the listing is temporarily removed until verification is completed.⁸ By comparison, entities like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist have no verification process and experience higher rates of fraudulent listings.⁹

By requiring platforms to verify authorization before publishing a rental ad, HB 1456 adds a level of due diligence that shifts the burden of detecting a fraud away from individual renters. It also

³ *In Washington State v. META Platforms, Inc.*, 33 Wash. App. 2d 138, 560 P.3d 217 (2024) (imposing a \$25 million penalty for Meta’s failure to comply with state political advertising disclosure requirements from 2018–2021; holding the law constitutional), review pending.

⁴ *Free Speech Coalition, Inc. v. Paxton*, 606 U.S. 461, 145 S. Ct. 2291 (2025).

⁵ *United States v. O’Brien*, 391 U.S. 367 (1968); *Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. v. Public Service*, 447 U.S. 557 (1980).

⁶ *Verifying Your Identity on Airbnb*, Airbnb Help Center: Verifying your identity on Airbnb, <https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/1237?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁷ *Zillow Rental Manager Account Verification*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/40388811116179-Zillow-Rental-Manager-Account-Verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁸ *Creating a Listing*, Zillow: Listing a Property, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/32915356424595-Creating-a-Listing?> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); *What is a Verified Source listing?*, Zillow: Renter FAQs, <https://zillow.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/216368218-What-is-a-Verified-Source-listing#:~:text=Verified%20Source%20indicates%20the%20listing,the%20most%20common%20red%20flags> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

⁹ Powell & Co. Property Management LTD, *Which is better? Rental Agency or Facebook Market Place*, <https://powellandco.nz/which-is-better-rental-agency-or-facebook-market-place#:~:text=Some%20risks%20associated%20with%20using%20Facebook%20Marketplace,arranged%20through%20Facebook%20Marketplace%20poses%20safety%20risks> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); Better Business Bureau, *Is That Rental Listing Real? BBB Study*, https://www.bbb.org/all/scamstudies/is_that_rental_listing_real_scam/is_that_rental_listing_real_full_study#:~:text=Though%20newspaper%20classified%20ads%20have,he%20had%20no%20more%20problems. (last visited Feb. 3, 2026); Lethub, *Spotting and Preventing Lockbox Rental Scams*, <https://www.lethub.co/blog/lockbox-rental-scams#:~:text=FAQs%20Which%20sites%20are%20known%20for%20most.anyone%20can%20post%20listings%20without%20much%20verification> (last visited Feb. 3, 2026).

protects property owners from unauthorized occupants and improves accountability for the platforms where these fraudulent listings appear.

I urge a favorable report on HB 1456.

Ray Nosbaum

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Uploaded by: Zafar Shah

Position: FAV



House Bill 1456

Consumer Protection — Residential Property Advertisement — Ownership Verification

Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee,

On April 1, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid submits its written testimony on House Bill 1456 at the request of bill sponsor Delegate Elizabeth Embry.

Maryland Legal Aid is a nonprofit law firm that provides free civil legal services to low-income and vulnerable Marylanders. Our offices serve residents in all 24 jurisdictions, and housing is our largest area of practice. Last year, Maryland Legal Aid’s Tenant Right to Counsel Project represented over 4,700 renter households across the State in eviction proceedings. As Wrongful Detainer evictions increased by over 70% in the past five years, we have encountered increasing numbers of residents victimized by rental scams. While media outlets and property owners implore the General Assembly to use immediate eviction and expanded criminal provisions to eliminate “squatting,” we ask the Committee to prioritize the more systemic solution to unauthorized leasing offered in HB 1456. Focused on stopping the proliferation of rental scams online, HB 1456 offers a preventative measure to address unauthorized leasing before unsuspecting renters become double victims, harmed first by a financial scam and secondly by eviction.

Online rental scams have proliferated amid rising housing unaffordability. According to the Federal Trade Commission, “many would-be renters report discovering that [a] scammer copied an ad for a property that was really for sale, not for rent. Other scammers create fake listings from scratch, complete with attractive photos and below market rent to grab your attention. While these scams show up on many websites, Facebook is the most reported platform. In the 12 months ending in June 2025, about half of people who reported a rental scam said it started with a fake ad on Facebook. Another 16% said the scam started with a fake listing on Craigslist.”¹

¹ Federal Trade Commission, “Rental Scams hit home with \$65 million in reported losses,” Consumer Protection Data Spotlight (Dec. 22, 2025), <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/data-visualizations/data-spotlight/2025/12/rental-scams-hit-home-65-million-reported-losses>.

Under HB 1456, whenever a commercial entity, including a social media platform, publishes or advertises residential property listings, it must verify that the person offering a property for rent is either the legal owner or the authorized agent of the owner. On discovery that a listing cannot be verified, the platform must remove the listing.

Rental Scammed: Nora's story

“Nora” is an Anne Arundel County resident whom Maryland Legal Aid met in the fall 2025. After she was evicted, she wrote her story so that policymakers would understand what she went through as a rental scam victim. We have changed her name to protect her privacy:

I was looking for a new home because my previous landlord was being foreclosed on. I had agreed to be out by a certain date, and I wanted to stay in the area because my son, who is autistic, was attending a great special-needs school in the Anne Arundel County school district.

I texted the number and met a person claiming to be the property manager. He showed me the property. It was a nice single-family home with two bedrooms and a basement. It was empty and needed a little work.

My husband, son, and I moved in in April 2025. My son thrives on routine and was becoming acclimated to a new routine in the house. We were about two months in when a lawncare worker came to the door. He said that this was a bank-owned property. I was skeptical, but then not long after a contractor showed up and said that he worked for the bank that owned the property. He told me that he had filed a police report to remove "squatters" in the home. We were not "squatters."

I am a hard-working mother. I have no criminal record. I was working full-time from home while my husband was awaiting medical clearance to return to his job. The house gave us a place where my son could be loud, scream, and stomp without upsetting the neighbors. When the "landlord" told me that the rent was \$1,500 a month, I was thrilled. In retrospect, under the pressure to keep my family afloat, I was also an easy mark.

I only ever met the man one time. He was middle-aged, clean cut, well-spoken, and well-dressed. He drove a nice Mercedes. I like to think that I am a pretty good judge of character. I never got any weird vibes from him. He really seemed like the real thing. Looking back, I see now that I was a sheep taken to slaughter. After I had paid \$3,000 cash for the first month rent and security deposit total, he then told me that he was going out of the country and would not be reachable for a couple weeks. If I needed anything, he would get back to me, he said. Soon, the hot water went up. Because the "landlord" was not responding to me, I paid for a plumber to install a new \$800 hot water heater. I figured I had to do what I had to do and that the "landlord" would eventually take it off the rent. But he still wasn't responding by the time that contractor came to tell me about the police report.

Then the bank filed the wrongful detainer case to evict us. Although the judge sympathized with us, he said he was there only to decide that the bank held the deed and had not authorized anyone to rent to me.

Everyone basically treated me like I did this to myself or that I was the wrongdoer. How was I to know that the property was not for rent? **The sheriff who evicted me explained that this is happening everywhere lately, and there is no way for the public to know a real owner apart from an impostor.** People are finding vacant or bank-owned properties, posting them for rent. They are using apps that create free, untraceable phone numbers and VPNs to disguise their IP addresses. The police would probably never find out who defrauded us.

Websites like Zillow, Hotpads, and Facebook Marketplace are not protecting users from scams. Sometimes I feel that I let my family down by getting scammed, but it's not all on me. A person who claims to be the owner should have to verify who they are, with a license or other documentation. There should also be solutions for situations like mine, to help victims of fraud, especially where children are involved. It can't just be eviction. The system needs to allow victims time to find another place. The state says they have resources, but there is just not enough real emergency

assistance for those who need it in a short amount of time. I called literally every shelter. They refused to take in my son because of his autism-related outbursts. We will spend months if not years on waiting lists for housing.

By requiring platforms to verify ownership or agency, HB 1456 requires due diligence by companies and platforms that publish rental listings. This bill shifts the burden away from renters who are unable to differentiate between legitimate and fraudulent advertising. It benefits property owners, as well, by reducing the incidence of unauthorized leasing. Amendments supported by the Maryland Realtors and representatives of the banking industry were adopted in the House. **For these reasons, Maryland Legal Aid urges a favorable report on HB 1456.** If you have any questions, please contact:

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