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Anne Arundel County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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SPONSOR TESTIMONY

**Senate Bill 0941 – Department of Housing and Community Development
Severe Health and Safety Risk Properties – Intervention Plan**

Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

For the record, I am Senator Shaneka Henson, representing District 30 in Anne Arundel County and a member of the JPR Committee. It is my privilege to present Senate Bill 0941 – *Department of Housing and Community Development – Severe Health and Safety Risk Properties – Intervention Plan* – and, after hearing the testimony today, to respectfully request a favorable report.

SB0941 requires the Department of Housing and Community Development’s Office of Landlord and Tenant Affairs, in consultation with the Attorney General’s Office, to identify rental properties that have received state funding and now pose *severe health and safety risks*. The Department must develop a responsive action plan and submit its recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on or before August 31, 2027.

The central purpose of the bill is to establish **clear legal definitions** supporting consistent enforcement. SB0941 provides a statutory definition of a “*severe health and safety risk property*” as a rental property that routinely fails to meet basic health and safety standards. It specifies qualifying conditions such as chronic noncompliance with local housing codes, repeated cycles of violations, persistent hazardous conditions, and ongoing failures to remediate. These definitions create **objective criteria** for agencies and courts, reducing ambiguity and limiting inconsistent application of enforcement tools.

Another strength of SB0941 is that it directs the Office of Landlord and Tenant Affairs—working in collaboration with the Attorney General’s Office—to develop a legally grounded **intervention plan**. This effort ensures that identification and remediation efforts reflect legal expertise, align with existing enforcement authority, and support defensible actions when matters require judicial review.

Importantly, SB0941 does **not** mandate automatic penalties. Instead, it requires a menu of tailored interventions proportionate to the severity and persistence of violations. These

may include financial consequences, corrective action plans with deadlines, mandatory inspections, remediation timelines, and—when necessary—legal actions such as injunctions or court proceedings.

This graduated framework respects due process by tying enforcement measures to documented patterns of noncompliance rather than isolated incidents.

The bill also recognizes the essential role of judicial oversight. By framing injunctive relief and other court-based remedies within a structured intervention plan, SB0941 promotes consistent, appropriate use of legal tools to address negligent or noncompliant landlords while respecting property rights and established legal standards.

The legislation prioritizes **tenant protection**. Potential interventions include tenant escrow, pest eradication plans, structural repairs, and temporary relocation when units are unsafe. These actions are coordinated—rather than ad hoc—ensuring that tenant safety is protected through a fair, legally sound process.

To support transparency and accountability, SB0941 requires the Department to submit its intervention plan and recommended statutory changes by a specific date. The sunset provision ensures the General Assembly has the opportunity to evaluate outcomes before adopting any permanent changes. This careful oversight allows legislators to calibrate future enforcement authority based on real-world results.

The intention of SB0941 is to establish a measured, legally sound approach to addressing severe health and safety failures in rental housing. By defining key terms, strengthening coordinated oversight, promoting proportional remedies, and preserving judicial review, the bill advances fairness, enforceability, and the protection of vulnerable residents.

Joining us today to highlight the importance of this legislation are representatives from Progressive Maryland's Housing Justice Committee, Maryland Legal Aid, and the Public Justice Center.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 941.