

SHANEKA HENSON
Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 203
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3578
800-492-7122 Ext. 3578
Shaneka.Henson@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY

Senate Bill 937 – Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act

Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

For the record, I am Shaneka Henson, representing District 30 in Anne Arundel County and member of the JPR Committee. It is my privilege to present Senate Bill 937, the Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act. This legislation strengthens Maryland’s housing framework by establishing clear statutory standards, enhancing procedural fairness, reducing litigation exposure, and supporting consistent, transparent decision-making across the rental market.

Establishing Clear and Predictable Legal Standards

A core strength of SB0937 is its replacement of informal or inconsistent practices with precise statutory rules governing how and when criminal history may be considered in residential leasing. The bill defines key terms—such as conditional offer—and specifies exactly which serious convictions may be considered and at what stage in the process.

For example -- Under current law, two landlords reviewing the same applicant could apply entirely different criteria—one using a decade-old misdemeanor to deny housing, another ignoring it. Such inconsistencies create unnecessary legal risk and undermine fairness. SB0937 replaces this uncertainty with uniform statewide rules.

Embedding Due Process and Procedural Protections

SB0937 builds procedural fairness directly into the leasing process. If a landlord withdraws a conditional offer based on permitted criminal history, the bill requires written notice stating the reason, disclosure of the information relied upon, and advising the applicant of their right to request reassessment.

For example -- An applicant may be flagged for a conviction that was dismissed or expunged in another state. SB0937 ensures they have an opportunity to correct that error before losing a housing opportunity.

Prohibiting Blanket Bans While Allowing Individualized Assessment

The bill eliminates blanket exclusions based solely on the presence of a criminal record. Instead, it requires an individualized assessment considering the nature of the offense, the time elapsed,

rehabilitation, and safety considerations—all consistent with constitutional and civil-rights principles.

SB0937 places enforcement within the Maryland Consumer Protection Act, providing clear civil penalties, rulemaking authority, structured complaint procedures, and protections for landlords acting in good faith.

SB0937 reflects thoughtful legislative drafting that advances the Judicial Proceedings Committee's priorities: legal clarity, fairness, due process, and predictable enforcement.

After hearing from John Bae with the Vera Research Institute and Ramieka Robinson, affected tenant, and for the reasons stated above, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 937.