



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 313
Landlord and Tenant - Residential Housing
Rental Applications and Tenant Screening
Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart
February 5th, 2026 | Economic Matters Committee

Introduction

HB 313 is a transparency, accuracy, and fairness bill. It does not prevent landlords from screening tenants. It does not dictate who must be accepted or rejected. What it does is ensure that when life-altering housing decisions are made, they are based on accurate information, disclosed criteria, and a process that allows prospective tenants to understand—and correct—what is being used against them.

What HB 313 Does

HB 313 modernizes Maryland’s rental application process in three key ways.

First, it requires landlords to clearly disclose, in writing, what information will be used in a tenant screening report and what criteria may result in denial or conditional acceptance *before* collecting application or screening fees. This protects prospective tenants from paying fees for units that are unavailable or from being screened against undisclosed standards.

Second, when a landlord takes adverse action—denial, conditional acceptance, or placement on a waiting list—the bill requires written notice explaining the specific reasons for that decision and provides the applicant with a copy of the tenant screening report relied upon. Prospective tenants are also expressly informed of their right to dispute inaccurate or incomplete information.

Third, HB 313 prohibits the use of shielded, sealed, or suppressed eviction proceedings—particularly failure-to-pay cases that did not result in a judgment of

possession—as a basis for denial. It also places clear obligations on tenant screening companies to prevent disclosure of information that the law already deems inaccessible to the public.

Violations are enforceable under Maryland’s Consumer Protection Act, ensuring meaningful compliance while relying on existing enforcement frameworks.

Why This Matters

Tenant screening has become a high-stakes, high-speed, and largely unregulated industry. What began as basic credit and reference checks has evolved into a multibillion-dollar market dominated by data aggregation, automated decision tools, and algorithmic scoring.

These systems often rely on scraped data, incomplete court records, and automated matching that struggles with common names, outdated filings, and procedural nuances in eviction law. The result is a screening report that appears authoritative but may be factually wrong—or legally irrelevant.

For many applicants, a rental denial is not just inconvenient. It can mean instability, displacement, or homelessness. Yet under current practice, applicants are frequently rejected without explanation, without access to the report used against them, and without a meaningful opportunity to correct errors.

HB 313 addresses that imbalance.

It recognizes that landlords have a legitimate interest in assessing risk—but that interest does not require secrecy, inaccuracy, or reliance on information the law has already determined should not be used.

The Role of Automation and Screening Technology

Many tenant screening reports now rely on automated tools, including artificial intelligence, to flag “risk.” These tools are not inherently unlawful—but they amplify errors when they are opaque, unreviewable, or disconnected from actual tenant behavior.

A report that overweights credit metrics, misinterprets eviction filings, or fails to account for long histories of on-time rent payment may say more about the limitations of the model than the reliability of the tenant.

HB 313 does not ban technology. It insists on accountability when technology is used. Transparency and the right to dispute inaccurate information are basic consumer protections—especially when automated systems are involved.

Why This Is Fair to Landlords

Nothing in HB 313 prevents landlords from screening applicants, setting reasonable criteria, or protecting their financial interests.

What the bill requires is clarity, consistency, and honesty in the process.

When tenants know the criteria up front, fewer applications are wasted. When landlords explain adverse decisions, disputes are resolved earlier. When screening reports are accurate, landlords make better decisions.

Transparency reduces friction. Predictability reduces litigation. Accuracy benefits both sides.

Why a Favorable Report Is Warranted

Housing stability is foundational to economic stability. A rental application process that operates as a black box—where fees are collected, decisions are automated, and explanations are withheld—undermines trust and fairness in the housing market.

HB 313 restores balance without overreach. It aligns Maryland law with basic consumer protection principles and modern realities of data-driven decision-making. And it ensures that lawful tenant screening remains just that—lawful.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 313.

Thank you.