

February 18, 2020

Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 744, Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases - Tenant Rights and Protections (Tenant Protection Act) (Support)
Testimony for February 18, 2020

Jane Lyons, Maryland Advocacy Manager

Thank you, Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Environment and Transportation Committee members. This testimony is on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the D.C. region advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities. We are in favor of HB 744, a bill that establishes long overdue basic rights for tenants.

HB 744 is an omnibus renter's rights bill which includes a requirement that security deposits be returned within 30 days, allowance for a tenant to terminate their lease if the landlord fails to make in-unit repairs within a reasonable timeframe, and an authorization for a tenant to terminate their lease without fear of future liability in cases where they have faced harassment and stalking, and must move for their safety.

Renters are a growing population in Maryland. Currently, nearly 40 percent of residents are renters. As this trend continues, it will only become more important to ensure that Maryland's tenant protections are of a high quality. Home is the center of life and family security – the improvements to landlord-tenant law in HB 722 can make all the difference in someone's life and to their family.

Right now, we're behind. Maryland ranks 32nd for tenant rights. Strong tenant protections can mean the difference between a community being welcoming and inclusive, or not. Inclusive policies that protect more vulnerable community members are especially important as neighborhoods grow and change. Tenant empowerment helps residents stay in their neighborhoods and benefit from new amenities.

This bill is part of a larger bill package called "Homes for All," which includes two other bills: HB 1149, which creates a program to finance social housing projects, and HB 1406, which legalizes the construction of multifamily housing in neighborhoods with higher incomes, an abundance of job opportunities, and access to public transit. Fixing the lack of affordable housing is critical to Maryland's economic competitiveness, and the three bills together will increase the supply of affordable housing, improve access jobs, and provide greater security for renters, enabling them to focus on work and improvement, and their children to have the home security they need to do well in school.

Therefore, we urge you to support HB 744 and protect the rights of nearly 40 percent of Marylanders. Thank you for your consideration.