



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Testimony to the Environment and Transportation Committee
HB0491: Landlord and Tenant - Repossession for Failure to Pay Rent - Lead Risk
Reduction Compliance
Position: Favorable

February 18, 2020

Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401
Cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances financial justice and economic inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland. In 2019, the Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland became a program of MCRC.

A full 90% of the complaints we received in 2019 were centered around housing code violations, denial of essential services, and otherwise substandard housing. Of those complaints, 30% of the properties were not properly licensed and/or inspected, per Baltimore City law. A handful of them had expired licenses and could be brought into compliance -- but even more disturbing, the overwhelming majority of these properties had never been inspected or licensed. In one instance, one property had not been inspected since the late 1990s, and was found to have almost all of the same code violations being reported by a tenant in 2019 as were found in the 1990s.

Lead poisoning has been a serious housing issue in Baltimore City for decades, and continues to plague our low-income families, and Black families disproportionately. As part of our work at the Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland, upon receiving a complaint from a tenant, we research the registration and inspection status of each property, along with the lead registration with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). In 2019, one third of the Baltimore



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City properties researched were found to not to not be registered with MDE. Of these properties, 90% were located in redlined low-income majority-Black neighborhoods where most, and in many cases all, structures were built before 1978.

We cannot continue to ask Baltimore's tenants to accept substandard, dangerous housing as the norm. Nor can we continue to ask Baltimore's tenants to accept the idea of landlords being allowed to evict tenants while being clearly in violation of our most basic laws and standards. HB0491 sends a strong message to landlords and property managers who have continually ignored our city's housing standards and basic human decency.

For all these reasons, we support HB0491 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Carol Ott
Tenant Advocacy Director
Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland