



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 491

### Landlord and Tenant – Repossession for Failure to Pay Rent – Lead Risk Reduction Compliance

*House Environment and Transportation Committee*  
February 18, 2020

*Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs*

#### **Member Agencies:**

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Baltimore Jewish Council  
Behavioral Health System Baltimore  
CASH Campaign of Maryland  
Catholic Charities  
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland  
Family League of Baltimore  
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Health Care for the Homeless  
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Maryland Catholic Conference  
Maryland Center on Economic Policy  
Maryland Community Action  
Partnership  
Maryland Family Network  
Maryland Hunger Solutions  
Paul's Place  
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**Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports HB 491**, which alters the procedures by which a landlord may repossess property for failure to pay rent in the State and in Baltimore City.

**Eviction is a devastating event for any family and often causes a descent into poverty and homelessness.** Maryland is the 8th “least-affordable” state with regard to housing.<sup>1</sup> Those living at or near poverty are constantly on the brink, just one emergency or unexpected expense from losing their housing. Under these circumstances, Maryland should be working to prevent loss of housing, particularly among families with children. Safe and reliable housing provides the stability needed to secure and maintain employment, promotes good health, and ultimately saves the state resources that otherwise go to maintain shelters and state-funded safety net programs.

**Unfortunately, low-income Marylanders are often relegated to the lowest quality housing stock, and need the courts to enforce housing standards.** According to a recent study and report about Baltimore City’s Rent Court, about half of landlords submitted invalid registration and licensing credentials to the court in order to get their law suit docketed.<sup>2</sup> Even worse, four of five landlords provided information about their mandatory lead risk reduction compliance that was incorrect, outdated, or otherwise unsupported by data from the state regulatory agency. Low-income families often lack the resources, information, networks, and legal protections needed to hold their landlords to minimal standards. They find themselves in the impossible position of choosing between living in housing conditions that threaten their health or risking eviction.

**HB 491 requires landlords to demonstrate valid rental licenses and lead inspection certificates at the time of trial in failure to pay rent actions, which will help protect residents who reasonably withhold rent until minimal safety and health standards are met.** Landlords must be held accountable to existing legal standards, and tenants must be protected. These ideals are in line with the public health recommendations from the 2016 workgroup on landlord/tenant issues, and as noted in the fiscal note, would help low-income tenants that are represented in the almost 670,000 actions for failure to pay rent that are filed in Maryland District Court.

HB 491 is a fair approach to assist low-income tenants facing failure to pay rent actions court. **MAP appreciates your consideration and urges a favorable report on HB 491.**

*Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.*

<sup>1</sup> National Low-Income Housing Coalition (2019). *Out of Reach*.  
[https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR\\_2019.pdf](https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Public Justice Center. (2015). *Justice Diverted – How Renters Are Processed in the Baltimore City Rent Court*.  
<https://abell.org/sites/default/files/files/cd-justicediverted216.pdf>