

# JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 821**

### **Montgomery County Stable Homes Act (MC 12-20)**

TO: Hon. Kumar Barve, Chair and members of House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: March 10, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates for policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and income for low-income workers in Maryland. JOTF supports House Bill 821 as a means to ensure housing stability for low-wage working families who often face housing instability and discrimination due to the rising cost of living, but stagnant wages within the state of Maryland.

Maryland's low-wage workers are especially vulnerable to the practice of eviction, as they are often faced with rising costs and a lack of affordable housing options, especially in Montgomery County. In 2018, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition's released state data on housing affordability by state and county. As a state, affordable housing in Maryland was declared as simply "out of reach,[1]" while the data gives a startling glimpse into the reality of our low-wage working families and residents.

Even further, in Montgomery County, the disparity between low wages and affordable housing is even greater than the state average. Data shows that in Montgomery County, a low-wage worker would need to work 115 hours per week to afford a market-rate apartment. Additionally, the data shows that "affordable rent" for an individual making minimum wage is actually on \$525 per month. In addition, a 2016 Harvard study, showed that stable housing has a direct impact on an individual's ability to maintain employment. This study found that the likelihood of job loss was 11 to 22 percent higher for individuals who did not have secure housing[2]. Even further, lost employment disrupts the ability to maintain housing – creating a vicious cycle of poverty for Maryland's most vulnerable.

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Maryland needs a stronger housing policy that considers the landlord and the tenant equally. House Bill 821 is a necessary step towards ensuring stable housing, and in turn, stable employment for residents who are already struggling to make ends meet. Through this legislation, residents will be given proper notice of their eviction and landlords will have to provide a justifiable cause, as listed, to why the eviction has occurred. This is not a burden and increases accountability in a system that is too heavily skewed towards the landlord and housing industry. Montgomery County has the opportunity to alleviate the poverty trap that exists between affordable housing and low-wage workers.

JOTF understands the fragile relationship that exists between housing and employment: to be stable in your employment, you must have a consistent, reliable, and safe place to live. For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 821.

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[1] <https://nlihc.org/oor/maryland>

[2] <http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mdesmond/files/desmondgershenson.sp2016.pdf?m=145263882>