



SENATE BILL 544
Statewide Eviction Data Reporting
Hearing on Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee – February 18, 2020
Position: SUPPORT

The Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (“PBRC”), an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the statewide clearinghouse for pro bono civil legal services in Maryland. As the designated pro bono arm of the Maryland State Bar Association, PBRC provides training, mentorship, and pro bono service opportunities to members of the private bar. We respond to acute legal needs of low-income communities identified in areas across the state by piloting innovative pro bono service projects targeting specific legal problems or populations. Most of PBRC’s work and the work of other non-profits, legal service providers, and stakeholders throughout the State is heavily influenced and informed by data. We refer to data to identify trends and emerging issues, and to determine where we should focus our pro bono efforts.

Matthew Desmond, Eviction Lab founder and Princeton Professor of Sociology,
perfectly analogizes the importance of eviction data:
“Imagine if we didn’t know how many people got cancer every year?”

We do not know how many people are evicted in Maryland or where the evictions are occurring. Currently, the data on evictions in Maryland is inconsistent, often inaccessible, and only gives us totals—for example, the total number of Landlord/Tenant filings, and, in some jurisdictions, the total number of evictions carried out by the Sheriff’s Office. The total number of court filings does not tell us the most important pieces of information in combating homelessness, housing instability, and community destabilization: Where are evictions happening and how often does it happen?

SB 544 creates publicly accessible, centrally and consistently collected data on evictions in Maryland that would be available for download in a format where researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, and any member of the public can analyze, aggregate, and utilize the data to understand the scope and severity of the problem.

In May 2017, PBRC launched a pro bono program in Baltimore City Rent Court—the “Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day Program”—due to the number of tenants appearing unrepresented in their eviction hearings. We know from the data PBRC collects on its rent court cases that many tenants we serve prevail at their rent court hearing. But due to the absence of data on actual evictions, we cannot determine whether overall eviction rates are declining as a result of our pro bono program. Not only does PBRC have an interest in understanding the impact of our work, but so do the 100+ members of the private bar who come to rent court to offer free legal representation to tenants at risk of eviction.

PBRC urges a FAVORABLE report on SB 544.

Please contact Sydney Dunning, Director of PBRC’s Courtroom Advocacy Project, with any questions.
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