



520 West Fayette St., Baltimore, MD 21201
410-685-7878 | 800-492-1964
fax 410-685-1016 | tdd 410-539-3186
msba.org

To: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Hon. Mark F. Scurti, President, Maryland State Bar Association
Date: January 26, 2021
Subject: **Senate Bill 232- Civil Cases - Surcharges**
Position: **Support**

The **Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) SUPPORTS Senate Bill 232 - Civil Cases - Surcharges**. Since its creation by the General Assembly in 1982, the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) has been funded largely by a patchwork of funding sources, including Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA), certain filing fee surcharges, and an annual disbursement from the State of Maryland Abandoned Property Fund.

The MLSC aids Marylanders from every corner of the State by distributing funds through its grantees throughout Maryland. Those grantees operate the service programs that offer civil legal aid to qualified low-income Marylanders.

The **MLSC is the largest provider of civil legal aid in Maryland**. It currently provides funding to 37 nonprofit grantees throughout Maryland to ensure that eligible clients in all areas of the State have access to legal assistance. Nevertheless, **80% of Marylanders who need help with a civil legal problem do not receive they legal help they need in times of crisis**. That unfortunate fact contributes to the destabilization of at-risk Maryland families, and communities.

The MSBA strongly believes that civil legal aid is a prudent investment in families and communities – all across Maryland. The MLSC reports that funding of civil legal services to low-income Marylanders provides a \$6 return on every dollar invested.

The MSBA believes that programs such as those funded by MLSC ensure access to justice for all Marylanders. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for civil legal services in Maryland was far outpacing available funding to provide such services. The current public health emergency



520 West Fayette St., Baltimore, MD 21201
410-685-7878 | 800-492-1964
fax 410-685-1016 | tdd 410-539-3186
msba.org

has decimated all MLSC funding streams. The MSBA believes that the current MLSC fiscal condition represents an ominous danger to Maryland's overall well-being.

While the MSBA is genuinely mindful of fees related to access to Maryland's courts, we would point out that, in the aggregate, court filing fees in Maryland are significantly lower than those of most states in the nation. For that reason, we regard the surcharge increases proposed in SB 232 as a wise investment in helping Maryland families navigate the uncertain economic conditions ahead.

Accordingly, the **MSBA SUPPORTS Senate Bill 232, and urges a Favorable Committee Report.**