



**Testimony to the Judicial Proceedings Committee
SB 232 - Civil Cases – Surcharges
Position: Favorable**

January 22, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

cc: Members, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Honorable

Honorable Chair Smith, Jr. and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to urge your support of SB 232, which would institute modest increases to surcharges on certain court filing fees for the purpose of increasing funding for the Maryland Legal Services Corporation Fund. I am urging this support on behalf of St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center (St. Ambrose), a non-profit organization whose mission is to create, preserve, and maintain equal housing opportunities for low and moderate income people primarily in Baltimore City, and encourage and support strong and diverse neighborhoods. St. Ambrose provides a range of services including housing counseling for first time homebuyers, financial education as well as provision of affordable housing options.

The Legal Service Department at St. Ambrose assists an average of 1000 lower income residents each year with legal issues which threaten the stability of their housing. These issues range from brief advice to representation in matters such as foreclosure, landlord tenant disputes, title issues, estate matters, and tax sales. These pro bono services are for individuals who would not otherwise have representation because they cannot afford an attorney. In the coming months and year as moratoriums are lifted the effects of the economic downturn are realized, we expect increased demand for our services aimed at keeping people in their homes and giving them time to address longer term strategies.

Funding from the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) is instrumental in helping sustain the great work that our Legal Service Department does at this crucial time. We are urging support of this bill to help increase the funding of MLSC which suffered greatly last year due to court closures and the lack of filings. Increased funding will help ensure access to justice not only for the individuals we serve, but for those served by the numerous other MLSC-funded organizations which do great work statewide.

We urge you to support MLSC and pro bono legal services by voting in favor of SB 232. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Owen Jarvis
Director of Legal Services
St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center