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**SB 232/HB 478**  
**CIVIL CASES - SURCHARGES**  
**HEARING BEFORE THE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE**  
**JANUARY 26, 2021**  
**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (“PBRC”), an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the statewide clearinghouse for volunteer 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. **PBRC supports SB 232/HB 478 because the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (“MLSC”) needs the revenue from raising certain court filing fees in order to sustain its funding of critical civil legal services, including those provided by PBRC, to vulnerable residents of our state.**

MLSC funding comprised 34% of PBRC’s budget in fiscal year 2020. PBRC’s projects include home preservation (covering tax sale and foreclosure prevention), consumer protection, immigration (including unification of unaccompanied children with their families), senior stability, eviction prevention and tenant advocacy. These projects incorporate extensive volunteer service components through community and/or courthouse clinics—and now remote clinics—that offer essential legal help to thousands of clients in need, allowing us to screen and triage case referrals where further representation is required. We also recruit, train, and engage hundreds of lawyers in the myriad of civil legal areas that impact low-income individuals and refer them to other legal services providers so they can offer high quality legal services to their client populations.

In fiscal year 2020, PBRC volunteers and staff closed 2,351 cases through its projects. In most cases, clients represented by PBRC volunteers and staff prevailed or received positive outcomes: we prevented unlawful evictions, significantly reduced consumer debt collections, saved homes from tax sale, preserved intergenerational wealth by drafting life-planning documents to pass properties to family members, resolved utility bill disputes, connected unaccompanied children with families, and facilitated legal education and outreach. Success rates for our clients ranged from 99% in consumer protection cases, to almost 78% for our tax sale prevention clinics, and 76% of clients either avoided an eviction entirely or were granted a postponement delaying the eviction through our Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day Program. **Grant funding from MLSC makes these outcomes possible for our clients.** Our clients are predominately low-income and from communities of color. The COVID crisis has not only exacerbated problems for these clients but has specifically created a devastating impact on MLSC whose revenue has dropped precipitously. It is imperative to now increase the surcharges on court filing fees to bolster MLSC and its grantees.

PBRC supports SB 232/HB 478, which would help secure critical funding for the Maryland Legal Services Corporation and its grantees, thereby helping to ensure the ongoing provision of civil legal services to our state’s at-risk population. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

For the above reasons,

**PBRC urges a FAVORABLE report on SB 232/HB 478.**

Please contact Allison Harris, Director of PBRC’s Home Preservation Project, with any questions.

[aharris@probonomd.org](mailto:aharris@probonomd.org) • 443-703-3050