



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

**Testimony to the House Judiciary Committee**  
**HB1312: COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act of 2021**  
**Position: Favorable**

February 17, 2021

The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair  
Judiciary Committee  
Room 101, HOB  
Annapolis, MD 21401  
cc: Members, Judiciary Committee

Honorable Chair Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of HB1312.

In 2020 we received a total of 939 complaints from Maryland residents statewide. Of those 939, 512 were related to eviction, and all but four were received **after** the Governor's emergency order was signed in March. It's clear that Maryland has had an eviction problem for many years, stemming from a lack of safe and affordable housing, and COVID has made things far worse for many families across our state.

HB1312 would give more tenants an opportunity to know their rights, and clearly outlines new responsibilities of local government agencies that are responsible for notifying tenants about evictions. The bill also directs the state to collect and maintain eviction data for local jurisdictions, something that's long overdue, as most families affected by eviction and the lack of affordable housing are non-white households. Only 17% of our 512 tenants who needed assistance with eviction in 2020 were white.

Once tenants know their rights, they're able to better advocate for themselves, and are more likely to stay in their homes -- and more importantly, stay out of court. Also, for advocates and local governments, having local eviction data readily available allows us to track problem areas, and create solutions that work for not just the management companies, but local governments and tenants.

The most important piece of the bill is the Maryland Rent Relief Fund. Most of our tenants have been laid off or lost their jobs altogether, because of COVID, yet there's very little financial support available to them, depending on where they live. We have no way of knowing when our communities will be free



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of COVID-related financial burdens, or when many of our tenants will be able to return to work. This fund is a critically important piece to not only our tenants' recovery post COVID, but for the state's economy as well.

For all these reasons, we support HB1312 and urge a favorable report.

Best,

Carol Ott  
Tenant Advocacy Director  
Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland