

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am a resident of MD District 21 and have lived in Maryland most of my 70 years. I am a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. I am also a Christian who believes we must take seriously what Jesus said in regards to the least of these in Matthew 25. I am testifying **in support of House Bill 18**.

While landlords almost always have a lawyer or agent for eviction hearings, the vast majority of renters are not represented. This imbalance means hearings almost always end in eviction. Evictions destabilize families and communities and prevent safe distancing during the pandemic. This bill guarantees Maryland renters legal counsel in eviction proceedings.

In Baltimore City alone, there are over 140,000 eviction cases filed each year and nearly 70,000 evictions are ordered. The main reason we see this huge imbalance is because only 1% of tenants have a lawyer: that should be considered illegal. The report *The Impact of an Eviction Right to Counsel in Baltimore City*, authored by Stout Risius Ross, LLC, and funded by a grant from the Abell Foundation, estimates that 92% of represented tenants would avoid disruptive displacement with a right to counsel in Baltimore City. That translates to 5,777 households and 17,300 people each year just in one city. Imagine how many families could avoid sudden homeless if this common-sense law applied state-wide.

In a Baltimore Sun Editorial from May 2020, it was stated *“The problems created by coronavirus today aren’t going to disappear tomorrow — especially if we’re not planning for them now. The consequences of losing a home are devastating even without a pandemic in place. Baltimore must do all it can to help struggling residents uphold their responsibilities.”*

Baltimore successfully passed legislation this year to ensure Right to Counsel, let’s do it across the state of Maryland. To conclude, I strongly encourage you to vote **in support of House Bill 18**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Linda K. Girdner, Ph.D.
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