

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland. I am a resident of MD District 43. I am **testifying in support of House Bill 1312**, the COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act.



House Bill 1312 would extend the foreclosure moratorium, prohibit rent increases and late fees during the COVID-19 pandemic, allocate adequate budget funds to landlords to allow for rent forgiveness, provide statewide distribution of Know Your Rights information to tenants, and codify federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance.

The best defense against COVID-19 is to socially distance from other people. At the same time, the pandemic has threatened the housing stability of all Americans, especially Black and Brown communities, causing people to lose their jobs, miss rent payments, and face eviction. Without a home, Maryland residents struggle to do the one thing that is proven to prevent infection: stay home. According to a recent report by WBAL, in November, 30% of Marylanders, including 36% of Black households, making less than \$50,000 per year could not afford their rent.

Housing has been a cause and effect of poverty in Maryland since long before the pandemic. As Attorney General Brian Frosh recently told the Baltimore Sun, eviction is a “root cause” of poverty “that perpetuates a cycle that can last for generations.” See Angela Roberts, Maryland housing advocates, lawmakers discuss bills to reform eviction process, stem housing crisis.”¹ As AG Frosh further explained, losing one’s home “disrupts lives in profound and irrevocable ways. It means loss not just of a home, but also of possessions, of school, of community, employment, mental and physical health and the ability to find another place to live.” The health and safety risks to people experiencing houselessness are always heightened, but this is even more true during the COVID-19 pandemic, when not having a home means not being able to socially distance from other people who might be carrying a deadly virus.

I support the COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act because all people in Maryland deserve the dignity of a safe and affordable place to live - especially during a global pandemic.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of House Bill 1312**. Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Smeton
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

¹<https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-pol-eviction-process-housing-crisis-pandemic-press-conference-20201228-eabul6dwnbgzfhy12d4wqr5rbq-story.html>