



House Bill 1312
COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act
Before the House Judiciary Committee
Feb. 17, 2021

Position: FAVORABLE

Renters United Maryland (RUM) is a statewide coalition of renters, organizers, and advocates for safe, stable housing. We stand on the principle that housing is a human right that is critical to an individual's quality of life, the health of families, and the prosperity of communities. The undersigned members of Renters United Maryland urge a FAVORABLE report on HB 1312, the COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act of 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put hundreds of thousands of Maryland households on the brink. **Over 2,500 Marylanders have been evicted** since July 2020 and landlords have been able to use loopholes in current restrictions to file more than **117,000 eviction cases**, primarily for non-payment of rent. Without immediate and meaningful action from the Maryland General Assembly during this legislative session, communities throughout the state will face an unprecedented level of displacement. As Attorney General Brian Frosh recently wrote, "Eviction... means loss, not just of a home, but also of possessions, school, community, employment, mental and physical health, and the ability to find another place to live." The risks to individuals and communities increase dramatically as COVID-19 cases surge. Loss of home is a public health risk and can be a death sentence.

The COVID-19 Eviction Relief Act of 2021 (HB1312) does **5 critical things** to support renters and landlords in Maryland during the ongoing pandemic:

1. Establishes a true emergency moratorium on eviction and, after the emergency, expands Gov. Hogan's affirmative defense against evictions through April 2022.
2. Prohibits lease non-renewals without a good cause, through April 2022. Rent delinquency and lease expiration are not good causes for lease termination.
3. Prohibits late fees and rent increases throughout the emergency.
4. Provides financial relief for landlords through a statewide fund that matches state funds to county funds and requires landlords to attempt to use rent relief and repayment plans before they can file for eviction in court.
5. Mandates the Department of Housing and Community Development's collection and sharing of anonymized, mappable eviction data.

Current eviction protections, both at the state and federal levels, are limited, subject to change, and proven to be insufficient to keep Marylanders stable and housed. Gov. Hogan's Executive Order is a trial defense, not a ban on evictions. If a renter proves "substantial loss of income" related to COVID-19 at trial, then the judge will delay eviction until after the State of Emergency. The CDC Order is similar in process but delays eviction until March 31, 2021. Neither order protects against lease non-renewals. Some localities have also enacted emergency prohibitions on rent increases and late fees while many others have not. This patchwork approach to

<https://rentersunitedmaryland.org>

Contact: Zafar Shah, (410) 625-9409 or at shahz@publicjustice.org

ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Maryland residents is not working. It is time for the Maryland General Assembly to establish strong protections for renters, provide desperately needed relief for tenants and landlords, and close loopholes that allow for continued filing of eviction cases during this emergency and throughout the ensuing economic recovery.

As members of Renters United Maryland, **we urge a favorable report from this committee on the COVID-19 Eviction and Housing Relief Act (HB1312).**

CASA
NAACP Maryland State Conference
Montgomery County Renters Alliance
Right to Housing Alliance
Strong Future Maryland
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Our Revolution Maryland
Homeless Persons Representation Project
Public Justice Center
Santoni Vocci & Ortega, LLC
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
Maryland Access to Justice Commission
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Health Care for the Homeless
Catholic Charities
Jews United for Justice
Beyond Boundaries
Communities United

<https://rentersunitedmaryland.org>

Contact: Zafar Shah, (410) 625-9409 or at shahz@publicjustice.org