



Right to Housing Alliance

HB 18 Right to Counsel in Eviction Cases

Hearing of House Judiciary Committee on February 17, 2021

Position: Favorable

My name is Detrese Dowridge and I'm currently the President of Right to Housing Alliance, and I also serve as a Steering Committee member for BRU (Baltimore Renters United). I'm writing this testimony in favor of the Right to Counsel bill. We believe that this bill will help provide relief for tenants who face injustices in an already broken rent court system. For years, I have seen and worked with tenants who are afraid to face their landlord out of fear of retaliation and sometimes threatened with eviction. I have also seen situations where if a tenant does defend themselves they aren't always given a fair shake in court even when there is evidence that supports the landlord's wrongdoing. Tenants should have the right to bring up a defense as to why their rent isn't paid. In some cases, there are situations where the tenants are living in deplorable conditions, bad accounting practices (which I went through as a tenant), and just simply having the misfortune of having a slumlord who just wants to collect rent and have no interest in remediation or no interest in providing the tenant with safe and habitable living.

Most tenants avoid going to court and often give up because they feel what's the use, the landlord will win anyway. But with an attorney by their side it gives them a glimmer of hope that their voice is being heard.

Thank You

Detrese Dowridge

President/Leadership Council Member

Right to Housing Alliance

443.863.9607