

February 17, 2021

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB18/SB154**  
**Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel**

**TO:** Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Judiciary Committee  
**FROM:** Anna Levy

My name is Anna T Levy, a resident of Rockville, MD, District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB18/SB154, Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel. Safe and stable housing has far reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. Renters routinely have little agency when faced with threats to maintaining stable housing. As a Jewish person, I am taught that all people should have *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for each person's needs. (Deut. 15:7-8) Consequently, society has an obligation to make sure that people can stay in their homes, especially during a time of pandemic.

Over 655,000 eviction cases are filed each year in the State of Maryland among 805,000 renter households. A study of eviction actions in one local jurisdiction found that while only 1% of tenants are represented in eviction proceedings, approximately 96% of landlords are represented by an attorney or specialized agent in such cases. Providing a right to counsel to tenants in eviction cases is a proven means of preventing displacement of families and the resulting social, economic, and public health costs of loss of home. Renters who don't have the advantage of an attorney are typically unable to defend themselves even when they have a legitimate defense that would help to avoid eviction. Evictions create significant costs for state and local government related to funding for shelter and education, as well as health care provided in hospitals instead of by community-based providers, transportation costs for homeless youth, and foster care. An estimate from Renters United Maryland suggests that an annual investment of \$28.5 million by the State would result in approximately \$90.1 in savings for services described above to offset the costs of evictions and homelessness. Notably, evictions have a disparate impact on Black and brown households in Maryland. Reducing the numbers of evictions would help to reduce significant racial inequities and strengthen the financial status of individuals and our communities.

Passage of Bill HB18/SB154 will establish a Right to Counsel Coordinator in the Attorney General's Office to provide legal service to low-income tenants, establish a task force of stakeholders to advise on the implementation of the bill, require annual reports and hearings to advise on implementation and effectiveness of the programs, and provide means for outreach to tenants.

**I respectfully urge a strong report from the Committee in support of passage of HB18/SB154.**