

Testimony to the House Environment & Transportation Committee

HB367: Landlord and Tenant – Repossession for Failure to Pay Rent – Rental Assistance Programs

Position: Favorable

February 8, 2022

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, HOB
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of HB367. This bill would require landlords to notify tenants about Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) and, based on reported eligibility and need, the landlord would have the obligation to wait 45 days to let the ERA application process.

Maryland has unprecedented funding to prevent evictions. Every dollar of our estimated rent debt of \$392 million (Dec. 2021) can be paid by the local emergency rental assistance programs (ERAPs) that have scaled up over the past year to deploy federal relief funds. Yet, in the second half of 2021, there were nearly 27,000 eviction cases filed for non-payment of rent per month. In that time, 705 households were evicted per month. These eviction cases proceeded because Maryland did not take steps in the 2021 Session to require that landlords utilize ERA before they can file Failure To Pay Rent (FTPR) eviction action. HB0367 creates that prerequisite step, to ensure that applications are made to utilize federal funds, cover outstanding rent, and avoid any resort to litigation.

In 2021, our Tenant Advocacy program received 1271 complaints from Maryland residents statewide. Of those 1271, 800 were related to eviction. HB0367 will ensure that tenants who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are able to receive rental assistance and remain in their homes.

For these reasons we support this measure and urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,
Isadora Stern
Policy Advocacy