



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 22, 2022

HB 674

Landlord and Tenant - Stay of Eviction Proceeding for Rental Assistance Determination

House Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public-policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch) dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

Senate Bill 674 provides for the stay of certain eviction proceedings when a tenant is waiting for a determination regarding the tenant's good faith application for rental assistance; and prohibiting a landlord from obtaining certain relief under certain circumstances.

Recently several bishop chairmen of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) wrote to all members of Congress addressing housing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic stating *“Ensuring stable housing is essential, especially during a public health crisis. Emergency rental assistance that meets today’s historic need is crucial in order to avoid evictions for tens of millions of people...to keep people safely housed until they are able to access these services, it is necessary to strengthen and extend eviction and foreclosure moratoriums and establish a national utility shutoff moratorium.”*

Amid this tide of eviction litigation, ERAP programs have had to prioritize applications in which tenants face pending evictions. They have collaborated with local sheriffs to identify addresses slated for eviction. The work of distributing federal relief funds broadly has become the urgent triaging of scheduled evictions. The cost of this dynamic has been to place timely applications on hold, to have tenants waiting months for assistance, until they are on the brink of losing their home. This is not fair or efficient. It rewards landlords who aggressively pursue eviction by pushing them to the front of the line while leaving behind those landlords who are cooperating with ERAP programs. House Bill 674 would remove that incentive for landlords to aggressively pursue eviction because the Court could pause the eviction while a good faith rental assistance application is pending. No one should be evicted when there is money to pay the rent – especially during a pandemic.

For this reason the Conference appreciates your consideration and urges a favorable report for House Bill 674.