



**MARYLAND
LEGAL AID**

Advancing
**Human Rights and
Justice for All**

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January 14, 2022

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Environment & Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Maryland Legal Aid's Testimony in Support of (with Amendments)
House Bill 134 - Failure to Pay Rent Proceedings - Prohibition on Rent
Increases and Sealing of Court Records**

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 134. Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA's 12 offices serve residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions. MLA handles various civil legal matters, including family law, housing, public benefits, consumer law (e.g., bankruptcy and debt collection), and criminal record expungements to remove barriers to obtaining child custody, housing, a driver's license, and employment. Maryland Legal Aid supports HB 134 and asks that the committee give it a favorable report with the amendments outlined below.

This letter serves as notice that Gregory Countess, Esq. will testify in support of HB134 on behalf of MLA at Delegate Vaughn Stewart's request. This bill precludes a landlord from raising a tenant's rent because the landlord obtained a judgment for possession against the tenant. HB134 also allows for sealing court records related to failure to pay rent cases. This bill requires the District Court to seal court records related to a failure to pay rent case within 60 days after the final disposition of the failure to pay rent case, if the result is not a judgment for possession in favor of the landlord. Additionally, if the landlord obtains a judgment for possession for a failure to pay rent case, this bill permits tenants to request that the District Court seal court records, provided the tenant meets specific requirements. There is an exception, however, which is addressed below.

Currently, there is no mechanism in Maryland law for the sealing of any eviction proceedings. As such, these records remain open to the public for inspection indefinitely. The unlimited access to court records related to eviction proceedings serves as an obstacle to low-income clients looking to secure housing,

