



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 724

HB 724 - Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Funding

House Judiciary Committee, February 16, 2022

Submitted by Julia Gross and Kali Schumitz, Co-Chairs

### Member Agencies:

211 Maryland

Advocates for Children and Youth

Baltimore Jewish Council

Behavioral Health System Baltimore

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Catholic Charities

Energy Advocates

Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Family League of Baltimore

Fuel Fund of Maryland

Health Care for the Homeless

Homeless Persons

Representation Project

Job Opportunities Task Force

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,  
Inc.

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Loyola University Maryland

Maryland Catholic Conference

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Community Action  
Partnership

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Paul's Place

Public Justice Center

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

Welfare Advocates

### Marylanders Against Poverty

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**Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports HB 724**, which would transfer \$11.8 million to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Fund. Legal representation for tenants in eviction cases is a proven, cost-effective means of preventing eviction. In 2021, the General Assembly passed legislation mandating that all limited-income tenants in eviction cases “**shall have access to legal representation**” as provided under this subtitle.” RP § 8-902. It is time for the General Assembly to fulfill this promise. The Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force recommended \$11.8 million for FY 2023—scaling to full implementation by 2025. Because the Governor allocated \$5.4 million for this purpose, we support a sponsor amendment to reduce the amount transferred by HB 724 to \$6.4 million.

**Eviction often leads to homelessness. Each year in Maryland, more than 30,000 people experience homelessness.** Leading researchers with the Aspen Institute and others have [documented the ways in which eviction cause homelessness and other forms of immense human suffering](#):

- [Following eviction](#), a person’s likelihood of experiencing homelessness increases, mental and physical health are diminished, and the probability of obtaining employment declines.
- Eviction is linked to [numerous poor health outcomes](#), including depression, suicide, and anxiety, among others.
- Eviction is also [linked with respiratory disease](#), which could increase the risk of complications if COVID-19 is contracted, as well as mortality risk during COVID-19.
- Eviction makes it more expensive and more difficult for tenants who have been evicted to [rent safe and decent housing](#), apply for credit, borrow money, or purchase a home.
- Instability, like eviction, is [particularly damaging to children](#), who suffer in ways that impact their educational development and well-being for years.

This does not include the [enormous public costs of eviction and homelessness](#) from Medicaid-insured homeless persons forced to use the emergency room as their primary care physician or the increased number of children forced to enter foster care due to eviction.

**Representation balances the scales and saves the state money.** Over 90% of landlords are represented by an attorney or specialized agent while over 90% of tenants are not. [Counsel is 92% effective in preventing disruptive displacement in evictions according to a study of one jurisdiction in Maryland](#). By fully implementing Access to Counsel, the State can help level the scales and save an estimated \$62M from reduced emergency room, shelter, and foster care costs. It is much less expensive to keep people housed than provide services when they are homeless. As such, MAP asks the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 724.

**Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.**