



**Testimony HB 724
Judiciary Committee
February 14, 2022
Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairperson Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Community Development Network of Maryland (CDN) is the voice for Maryland's community development sector and serves nearly 200 member organizations. CDN—focuses on small affordable housing developers, housing counseling agencies and community-based non-profits across the state of Maryland. The mission of CDN is to promote, strengthen and advocate for the community development sector throughout Maryland's urban, suburban and rural communities.

HB 724 Requiring the Comptroller to distribute \$11,800,000 of abandoned property funds to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund for fiscal year 2023.

Last year, the Maryland General Assembly passed a right to counsel but the program was not funded. In the future, this program will prevent some unnecessary evictions and increase housing stability for Marylanders who are struggling to make ends meet. Importantly, the program will also help level the playing field in rent court, where landlords have held huge advantages for decades. The justice system only works fairly when both parties have access to professional representation.

Evictions exacerbate the public health crisis posed by COVID-19 and create significant costs for state and local governments including costs associated with shelters, education, transportation for homeless youth, foster care, and health care provided in hospitals rather than community-based care. Further, evictions have had a disparate impact on Black and Brown households.

As the state invest hundreds of millions in eviction prevention funds, it is critical for Maryland policy makers at the local and state level to know the effectiveness of the programs by funding access to counsel. This is only a first step to addressing the complex issue that is evictions.

Over the past decade, research shows that evictions reinforce poverty and limit housing opportunities for Maryland's most fragile citizens. The stain of an eviction sets women of color on a path of housing insecurity that limits educational and economic opportunities, and increases health problems for them and their families.

We ask that the committee issue a favorable report on HB 724.

Submitted by Claudia Wilson Randall, Executive Director, Community Development Network