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TESTIMONY ON HB724/SB662 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Funding

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and member of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Sherry Glazer

My name is Sherry Glazer and I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB724, Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund – Funding

I am driven by my legal experience representing tenants in eviction proceedings in New York City several years ago. I observed the importance of being safely housed, and saw that tenants were profoundly impacted by the negative consequences of eviction. I also observed that tenants who were assisted by counsel fared much better than those without legal assistance. More importantly, other jurisdictions providing access to counsel programs estimate that 80% of all evictions are avoided.

During the last legislative session, the General Assembly passed the historic Access to Counsel law. However, as this Committee is well aware, no funding was established. Governor Hogan proposed approximately 5.4 million dollars in funding for this program in his recent budget, an amount well below the estimated cost of 12 million dollars per year. HB724 would rectify this immediate problem and require that approximately 11.8 million dollars from the State's Abandoned Property Fund be used to fund what is now an unfunded mandate. The law would transfer existing funds to the "Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund", providing funding to fully implement access to legal representation in evictions.

During this once in a century pandemic, it is critically important that the evictions in our State be curtailed. Renters United of Maryland reports that 62% of Marylanders feel they are likely to be evicted during the next two months. That translates to 1 in 5 Maryland renter households who state they are still struggling to catch up with their rent payments and stay housed. According to data from the Judicial system, there was an average of 705 evictions per month during the second half of 2021. This is a moral, political, and preventable failure. By providing counsel to qualified renters, these evictions can be prevented. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB724.**