



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair
Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 101
Annapolis, MD 21041

Re: Testimony **IN SUPPORT** of HB 729: Landlord and Tenant – Eviction Actions – Filing Surcharge and Prohibited Lease

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Committee,

I commend Attorney General Frosh for his leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening consumer protections and for introducing House Bill 729. This measure would increase the residential eviction filing fee to no less than \$120. House Bill 729 would also prohibit landlords from passing the increased filing fees on to residential tenants.

Some corporate residential landlords in Maryland have been able to use the low residential eviction filing fee to initiate legal proceedings against tenants as a form of rent collection. Unlike other states where the first step in the eviction process is often to resolve the matter by way of a payment plan, Maryland's eviction process begins with the landlord filing a nominal \$15. This fee is substantially less than the national average filing fee of \$122. Currently in Maryland, this minimal fee inadvertently incentivizes serial eviction proceedings of families who may only be a week or two behind on rent. This bill seeks to encourage alternatives as a first line of defense instead of evictions proceedings which have a detrimental impact on marginalized communities.

As County Executive, I have prioritized keeping residents in their homes during these challenging times. My Administration has already awarded more than \$6 million in rental assistance to residents facing housing insecurity. In January 2021, the U.S. Department of Treasury awarded a \$9.7 million grant to provide rental and utility assistance. This necessary assistance can be used to pay up to nine months of past due rent or utilities for residents that have dramatically suffered from a COVID-related loss of income, a reduction in work hours, or medical illnesses. House Bill 729 would complement these local-level rental assistance efforts.

Too many Marylanders during this pandemic have been forced to make the impossible choice of paying their bills or feeding their families. The prolonged economic uncertainty is taking a devastating toll on the health and well-being amongst our most vulnerable residents. I am pleased that Attorney General Frosh is committed to protecting families and working to make eviction proceedings a last resort, rather than a landlord's first option.

For these and many more reasons, I urge a favorable report on HB 729. Thank you for your consideration and continued partnership in helping Maryland families survive despite the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive