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Montgomery County Council Public Hearing - April 21, 2020
Expedited Bill 18-20, Landlord-Tenant Relations -
Rent Stabilization During Emergencies

This testimony is submitted in support of expedited bill, **Bill 18-20E - Landlord-Tenant Relations - Rent Stabilization During Emergencies** by Marilyn Kresky-Wolff and Anna T. Levy, both residents of Montgomery County and on behalf of Jews United for Justice. JUFJ draws on the Jewish tradition of a commitment to justice to advance campaigns to improve the lives of people in Montgomery County.

God's covenant with Abraham was that, "I will establish a home for my people Israel and will plant them firm, so that they shall dwell secure and shall tremble no more." As Jews, we are taught that tenant's rights are just as important as landlords' rights. We have an obligation to ensure fairness in tenant/landlord law, to ensure safe living conditions, and to prevent homelessness. More than 17 million Americans spend more than 50% of their income on housing, may be just one or two months away from eviction, and are never fully secure in their housing.

We thank the County Council and County Executive for your leadership and hard work, not only to protect Montgomery County residents from the immediate impacts of the current global health emergency, but for your continued efforts to plan for the recovery of all of our residents in the future, both short and longer term. **Bill 18-20 will provide critical support to the over ⅓ of County residents who rent their homes.** By providing assurances that rent will not increase during the emergency or in the 30 days after the emergency is lifted, this bill therefore provides some additional housing stability to vulnerable populations. Many renters are already facing reduced income and/or job loss and although the more generous unemployment compensation helps mitigate this loss, it is not available to all and may not cover even the essential costs of living; food, housing, healthcare and education. We know that rent costs in Montgomery are unaffordable for many vulnerable community members who live with no financial safety net. These communities include people of color, people with disabilities, and undocumented workers, some of whom will not be eligible for unemployment compensation. Stabilizing rent is not rent forgiveness, but it will help renters to plan for covering the bills that they know about without adding to their burden so that they can stay in their homes.

We also strongly urge the Council to **reject the proposed amendments** that permit rent increases under the Voluntary Rent Guidelines as well as rent increases and fee assessments based on financial hardship of the landlord. These amendments are not consistent with the spirit of the bill which places a freeze on **ALL** residential rent increases during and after this public health emergency. The only

exception to this that should be considered is to allow reasonable rent increases on a case by case basis for renters using three way Housing Choice Vouchers (landlord; tenant; federal government/HOC) since the small increase in rent will be paid by the federal government, rather than the tenant.

We appreciate that landlords of smaller properties will have negative financial impacts due to reduced rental income and possible additional costs due to the emergency. However, landlords, as business owners, including sole proprietors and those with no employees, are also eligible for emergency financial assistance, which would mitigate the immediate financial hardships caused by the current emergency.

We urge the Council to approve the proposed Bill 18-20 **without** amendments #2 and #3, with the exception for Choice Vouchers. Stable housing costs, especially for our most vulnerable populations, will help all of our communities to stay safe and healthy as we go through the immediate public health crisis and begin to heal and recover. Thank you for the opportunity to present our views on this important legislation.