

Dena Lebowitz



Testimony in support of the HOME Act Bill 16-23

District 4

I urge you all to support the HOME Act because it is the only bill that balances the rights of tenants and landlords. It is government's role to do so. If this bill does not pass, what will happen is massive destabilization in our communities. I know, because I have seen it before. Twice.

I lived in Boston in the 1990s when rent control in 3 cities (Boston, Brookline and Cambridge) was overturned by a statewide referendum. Rents immediately rose by extreme amounts, over 50% in many cases. My friends either left the state or moved an hour away. If this happened today, they would not be able to move an hour away because rents would still be prohibitively high.

A few years ago I moved to Silver Spring from St Petersburg, Florida. Rents in St Pete were very low in 2007 when I moved there. Now they are comparable to Montgomery County and skyrocketing. Restaurant workers, plumbers, carpenters cannot afford to live there any more. Public transit is very limited so people must drive 2 hours to commute.

I was so pleased to see the protections Montgomery County put in place for tenants during COVID. My rent went up \$5 last year. I was aware of the programs to help those who were evicted. I knew nothing like this exists in Florida.

But those were temporary protections. My rent is about to increase 10%. Even in Florida, where consumer and tenant rights are practically nonexistent, my rent increased only 6.7%. When I moved here I got a discounted rent due to higher vacancy rates during COVID. This increase will offset that discount plus a little more. I am fortunate that I can afford it this time. But I would not be able to afford it every year.

I am a downsizer, semi retired, 64 years old. 15% of Montgomery County renters are seniors. Not all of them have generous government pensions. Thousands of vulnerable seniors will face homelessness if the HOME Act does not become law. It is no longer possible to find an inexpensive apartment, because rents all over the country continue to rise. Even trailer parks in Florida are being bought by private equity firms who raise the rent, or simply convert the property to another use. People do not have the options for inexpensive housing that they had 20 years ago.

Let Montgomery County be the leader in creating sound policy that protects everyone.