

Good afternoon members of the Montgomery County Council. My name is Sergine Yango and I am a member of the Enclave Tenants' Association, where I live, and I am a member of Action in Montgomery. On behalf of Action in Montgomery, I am testifying today in support of Bill 6-25.

I have lived at the Enclave Apartments for a total of 15 years. What used to be luxury apartments has deteriorated. In the summer of 2023, I knocked door by door and heard from my neighbors that they shared the same maintenance challenges that I have.

- Air conditioning units that do not work in the summer, leaking water into the units, ruining carpets and causing leaks in the ceilings of neighbors living below;
- And the humidity has caused serious mold which has been well published in many news articles
- And you want to talk about rodents? We have a video when a man in a hazmat suit opened a ceiling panel and it RAINED dead mice, just piles of them. Imagine- for how many years the building did not do effective pest management for us to get to that stage. You can see and hear New York City sized rodents even in the lobby of the building.
- The washing machines in the basement do not work.
- And every week there are issues with the elevators which is extremely challenging because we have residents in wheelchairs

In the summer of 2023, when we had issues with management not fixing the apartments, we're often told- Call 311 and report the issue to Code Enforcement. That summer, when we met with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, we heard that there had been over 2,958 code violations. What we learned from the experience was that it was easier for the property owner to pay the fees than to fix the problems. What we learned was that DHCA was limited in what they could do.

These issues are not limited to The Enclave. Tenants at Cider Mill Apartments in Montgomery Village, Westchester West Apartments on Hewitt Ave in Silver Spring, and Northwest Park Apartments in Silver Spring are facing the same challenges. As middle and lower-income families, we are being left behind with soaring rent and utility bills, while not receiving the level of service we are paying for.

We support this Bill 6-25 because it gives our County another tool, another option to address the FAILURES of NEGLIGENT landlords. It corrects a wrong. It recognizes that renting units IS A business where a service is provided and the tenant PAYS for that service through rent and other fees. And as a consumer of that service, we should be able to benefit from the consumer protections laws.

Our Councilmember must stand with us and support this bill to ensure that we are treated fairly and with the respect we deserve. Thank you.