

Testimony in Support of
Bill 6-25 Consumer Protection - Defective Tenancies as Deceptive Trade Practices

My name is Mara Greengrass, I'm a resident of Council District 6, and a former renter in both Silver Spring and the city of Rockville. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 6-25: Consumer Protection - Defective Tenancies as Deceptive Trade Practices.

JUFJ represents over 2,000 Jews and allies across Montgomery County who act on our shared Jewish values to advance social, economic, and racial justice in our local community. JUFJ has consistently supported renters' rights initiatives here because we believe that every resident deserves to live in a safe, clean, and dignified home.

Before this bill was introduced, I had no idea that landlords were not considered "merchants" and were specifically exempted under Montgomery County's consumer protection laws! Once I learned this, I was floored and angered.

If my local grocery store knowingly sold me spinach that had salmonella, the county would be able to take action. If the dealer who sold my family a used Mazda two weeks ago knowingly sold us a car with faulty brakes, the county would be able to take action. But if I spend thousands of dollars on a security deposit and rent for an apartment and the landlord knew it had mold, rats, and a broken A/C unit, right now the county could do little to hold them accountable.

I support this legislation not only as a former renter and current District 6 resident, but also because my faith calls me to. Jewish texts are full of admonitions to provide safe and stable housing for all. The prophet Micah understood that housing is more than a roof over one's head and to deny a person safe housing is not only robbing them in the present, but also robbing their family for generations to come.

As Councilmember Mink noted in the press conference at this bill's introduction, rent is most often a consumer's largest expense. Montgomery County residents have the right to know what they are spending their money on, and take legal recourse when they have been misled. We know that living conditions are a huge factor in determining health outcomes, children's success in school, and overall well being. This bill provides a critical accountability measure to help ensure that residents have access to a safe and healthy home.

Landlords who are renting housing that doesn't threaten the health and safety of tenants have nothing to fear from this bill. Only bad actors who are defrauding residents need to be concerned. This bill simply creates a mandate for landlords to rent safe housing that matches what they have advertised.

The Office of Consumer Protection has a very special role in protecting Montgomery County residents and it must be allowed to do its job unhindered by loopholes and carve-outs for special

interests. Montgomery County must be able to hold accountable landlords who are renting unsafe housing. It's unconscionable that this situation has gone on as long as it has.

Thank you and I hope you will support Bill 6-25: Consumer Protection - Defective Tenancies as Deceptive Trade Practices, to finally close this loophole and return control to the county and its residents.