

Testimony In Favor of Bill 6-25: Consumer Protections-Defective Tenancies as Deceptive Practices Act

To The Honorable Council

Greetings

My name is Robert Stubblefield and I am a lifelong resident of Montgomery County. I am also a lay minister, an activist-organizer with a variety of groups such as the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition, Young People for Progress, Montgomery County Chapter of DSA and more but I am responding in my individual capacity to write in favor of Bill 6-25 Consumer Protections-Defective Tenancies as Deceptive Practices Act aka Consumer Protections. My reasons are detailed below.

The first reason why I am supporting this bill is because for too long, landlords, whether corporate, private, or HOC have and continue to abuse and mistreat renters. These abuses have been detailed to include unfit rental housing which is unfit for human beings, amenities not fairly advertised which creates problems in terms of hygiene, imposition of junk fees that will continue to push people further down into poverty, and chronic housing violations which these landlords have been getting away with for too long. One only need to look at the horror stories at places such as the Enclave, Blair Towers, Spring Parc Apartments and a host of other residences to see how they have flaunted housing codes. It should be noted that the Enclave has had issues dating back to when I was a child and it has only gone from bad to worse. This bill helps remove the veil of invincibility of these landlords by correctly listing them as merchants because that what they are when they rent they are providing a good. Not only that but now it makes them liable and at the same time providing renters with some form of equitable relief granted by a court. This is good news.

The second reason why I am supporting this bill is because it provides recourse and power to the renters. For too long landlords have been taking advantage of the housing crisis that increases every day in this country but in this county specifically. Due to this knowledge landlords have been able to use the looming threat of eviction to ruin families' lives. This has also led to a displacement crisis which health experts have noted that this type of trauma can shorten lifespans and ruin community ties, which leads to a decrease in school performance and more. This has also taken power from the renters. With this bill, The Office of Consumer Protection can investigate and enforce consumer protection in landlord-tenant matters which makes it easier for renters to complain to the Office of these heinous practices.

The third and final reason why I support this bill is because it is the right thing to do. In Matthew 25 it states that "what you do to the least of these you have done to me also." Renters

which include black and brown families, refugees, people with disabilities, and the intersection of these communities have been marginalized for too long and it is time that they have recourse and an end of the abuse. It is a duty of the government to look after the least of these, not the elite, not the developer/landlord class but to the masses. This bill is a good step in the right direction. To be clear, much more needs to be done in regards to our housing crises but this bill is a good start.

Uhuru and Thank you