



COMMISSION ON AGING

February 14, 2018

The Honorable Kumar Barve
House Office Building, Room 251
6 Bladen Street, Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 995 (MC-18)

Dear Delegate Barve:

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging strongly supports HB 995 (MC-18), which would prohibit a residential landlord from refusing to renew a lease or otherwise evicting a tenant from leased premises in Montgomery County without just cause.

Under current law, a landlord can refuse to renew a lease, or can evict a residential tenant, without providing a reason, no matter how well the tenant has complied with the lease provisions or how many years she has lived in the unit. In Montgomery County, this means that a landlord could refuse without reason to renew a lease or could evict a renter from her home of 20 years, with just a 60-day notice. An unscrupulous landlord could evict, or threaten to evict, a renter who complains about living conditions or requests accommodations for a disability. While there may be legal defenses to some eviction actions, litigating those defenses can be expensive, time-consuming, and out of reach for many renters. Many renters, moreover, are fearful of taking such steps.

HB 995 requires a landlord to renew a lease or to continue a tenancy unless there is just cause (a lawful reason) not to do so. The bill does not prohibit landlords from evicting tenants for substantial breaches of a lease, including nonpayment of rent, property damage, illegal activities and disruptive behavior. The bill does allow a landlord to terminate a tenancy for legitimate business reasons, including removing a unit from the market, renting a unit to a family member, or substantial renovation and demolition - provided that these actions are taken in good faith and not just to circumvent just cause eviction laws. It also allows a landlord to impose lawful rent increases. Similar laws are in already effect in several large rental markets, including Washington D.C., New York City, Seattle, San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and the state of New Jersey.

Evictions are disruptive for any household, but especially for people who are more vulnerable: children, people with special needs, seniors, and those with low and moderate or fixed incomes. Older adults comprise approximately one-quarter of Montgomery County renters. For them, housing instability can have significant costs, including social, physical, and mental decline, homelessness, and institutionalization. With rental housing accounting for approximately one-third of all units in Montgomery County, legislation such as this, which helps stabilize our communities by reducing evictions is critical.

Department of Health and Human Services

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The Commission on Aging continues to prioritize the need for more affordable housing options for seniors, more protections for renters, and more programs and services to address senior homelessness. HB 995 allows landlords to exercise their management responsibilities and remove tenants for good cause, while providing critical protection against discriminatory treatment, life-disruptions, and homelessness for all renters, but particularly for those who are older, have disabilities, or are living on fixed or modest incomes. We urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration of the Commission's support for HB 995.

Sincerely,

Isabelle Schoenfeld, Chair
Commission on Aging

cc: Leslie Frey, Department of Health and Human Services
John J. Kenney, Department of Health and Human Services
Matthew Losak, Renters' Alliance
Montgomery County Council
Montgomery County Delegation