

RENTERS' RIGHTS

**JEW'S UNITED
FOR JUSTICE**

THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.



KEY PARTNERS

Renters United Maryland including:

CASA

Homeless Persons Representation Project

Montgomery Renters Alliance

Public Justice Center

The Torah obligates us to preserve our own life and health, and that of others. The Gemara in Bava Kamma teaches that, in response to a plague, we have an obligation to stay in our homes as much as possible. We are also taught that all people should have *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for each person's needs. (Deut. 15:7-8) We have an obligation to make sure that people can stay in their homes, especially during a time of pandemic.

Safe and stable housing has far reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. Renters routinely have little agency when faced with threats to maintaining stable housing. Now many are confronting increased economic hardship, the shortcomings of eviction prevention policy, and the extreme threat to health resulting from homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHO'S IMPACTED

Renters who are living at or below the poverty line and/or who have experienced pandemic-related loss of income. Those who find themselves in Rent Court are overwhelmingly Black women, households with minor children, and who receive no housing subsidy.

KEY COMMITTEES

- Senate Judicial Proceedings (JPR), Chair: Will Smith (Montgomery County)
- House Environment and Transportation (ENT), Chair: Kumar Barve (Montgomery County)

December 2020

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LEGISLATIVE DETAILS

JUFJ and our coalition partners are calling for legislators to pass legislation during the 2021 legislative session to address emergency needs during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as well as longstanding needs that result from structural problems in the Rent Court system. Our priority legislation includes:

Emergency Eviction Prevention (Delegate Wilkins and Senator Smith):

- Prohibit landlords from terminating or not renewing leases unless they have a legitimate reason to do so. During a pandemic, failure to pay rent is not a legitimate reason.
- Require renters are offered payment plans before being taken to court for failure to pay rent.
- Establish a minimum arrears amount for filing a failure to pay rent suit (more than \$600).
- Expand and extend CDC order and Gov. Hogan's exec. order to cover all eviction filings, other than imminent threat, until April of 2022.
- Ban late fees/interest charges or raising rent rates throughout the pandemic.
- Provide financial relief for landlords by creating a program to mandate matching state/county budget funds for landlords to provide rent forgiveness.

Right to Counsel (Delegate Fisher and Senator Hettleman)

- Provide low-income tenants with the right to legal counsel/representation in Rent Court. Currently, 1% of tenants in Rent Court are represented, while 98% of landlords are. Establishing a right to counsel would not only help renters by reducing evictions; it would save the state \$18.1M, in addition to similar savings in local jurisdictions.

Rent Court Reform (Delegate Wells and Senator Sydnor)

- Increase potential for alternative resolutions by establishing a formal pre-trial structure for service providers to engage renters and landlords and for judges to order alternative dispute resolution if deemed appropriate.
- When no alternative resolution can be reached, increase the fairness of trials by providing renters time to seek counsel and to adequately prepare for trial.
- Give judges broader power to delay eviction in emergency situations - allowing time for renters to relocate should that be deemed necessary.

JUFJ will also be supporting tenant screening reform which should establish regulations to prevent landlords' use of irrelevant, incomplete, or inaccurate information about tenants to bar them from access to housing.

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Learn more at jufj.org and follow us on social media:



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