

Ethan Hasiuk
Jews United for Justice
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Re: 21-0083R Investigative Hearing - Baltimore City Sheriff's Office - Eviction Procedures

Dear Vice President Middleton & Members of the Economic and Community Development,

Thank you to Chair Middleton and the Economic and Community Development committee for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Ethan Hasiuk. I live in Charles Village in District 12, and I am testifying on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes more than 1,600 people in Baltimore City to support social, racial, and economic justice. JUFJ is a member organization of the Baltimore Renters United coalition. JUFJ and BRU are asking Baltimore City to suspend evictions during this pandemic emergency. Since the beginning of Jewish history, the human need for housing has been central to Jewish thought. **All people should be able to stay in their homes, especially during a pandemic.**

Unfortunately, Baltimore City has not upheld these obligations, as over 600 families were scheduled for an eviction over the course of the last three weeks, and another 71 are scheduled to be evicted this week.

Additionally, I would also like to remind you of just a few of the concurrent challenges facing Baltimore City families this month. Due to high rates of COVID-19 transmission, 60 Baltimore City schools switched over to virtual learning with less than 12 hours notice, sending parents scrambling to make childcare arrangements. We know that for some essential workers, staying home from work to take care of children for a week can mean missing a month's rent, and the United States congress has allowed the expanded child tax credit to expire, removing a financial lifeline for families.

In spite of reports that Omicron was a "milder" variant, COVID hospitalizations reached an all-time high in Baltimore City in January 2022 with twice as many hospitalized COVID patients than at any other time during the pandemic.¹

Baltimore City has slowed and restricted the rollout of federal rental assistance by limiting assistance to 12 months of back rent rather than 18 and has declined to systematically give assistance directly to tenants when it is rejected by landlords. Furthermore, at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, Mayor Young, Administrative Judge Waxman, and Sheriff Anderson collaborated to halt evictions. It is deeply disappointing that city officials chose not to halt evictions during the Omicron surge.

Now is not the moment to return to business-as-usual, to "compromise with callousness," as the great Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said.

¹ <https://coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov/>. See Page 5 of Dashboard, "COVID-19 Hospitalizations."

Recently, 12 local rabbis signed onto a letter calling for the immediate suspension of all evictions through the end of the COVID-19 crisis, and I will conclude by letting their words speak for themselves: “We need your action now. We need to protect renters who are at the greatest risk for contracting and spreading the virus. This is a time for moral action.”

We request a favorable report on City Council Bill 21-0083R and urge the Baltimore City Council as well as the Mayor’s Office to take immediate action to suspend evictions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ethan Hasiuk
Jews United for Justice
District 12