



Empowerment. Integration. Equality.

1500 Union Ave., Suite 2000, Baltimore, MD 21211

Phone: 410-727-6352 | Fax: 410-727-6389

www.DisabilityRightsMD.org

Corinne “Cory” Warren, Esq.
Disability Rights Maryland
1500 Union Ave
Suite 2000
Baltimore, MD 21211
410-727-6352
Cwarren@disabilityrightsmd.org

Re: 21-0083R Investigative Hearing - Baltimore City Sheriff’s Office - Eviction Procedures

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

My name is Cory Warren and I am a housing staff attorney with Disability Rights Maryland. Disability Rights Maryland (DRM – formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities and live in safe, decent, affordable and accessible housing.

People with disabilities have historically been forced into institutional settings, including state hospitals, nursing homes, and the criminal justice system.¹ This history contributes to persons with disabilities facing numerous and substantial barriers to fair and affordable housing from both the private and public housing sectors. Additionally, people with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty than their non-disabled peers. In 2020, 17.9 percent of persons with a disability were employed, down from 19.3 percent in 2019. For persons without a disability, 61.8 percent were employed in 2020, down from 66.3 percent in the prior year.² The combination of poverty and disability results in a disproportionate numbers of people with disabilities experiencing homelessness and, according to counts conducted in January 2017 across the country, it is estimated that on any given day nearly one-quarter (24%) of individuals experiencing homelessness (86,962 of 369,081 individuals) are people with disabilities who met the federal definition of experiencing chronic homelessness.³

¹ K. C. Lakin, S. Larson, P. Salmi, and A. Webster (2010). *Residential Services for Persons with Developmental Disabilities: Status and Trends through 2009*, University of Minnesota, <http://rtc.umn.edu/docs/risp2009.pdf>

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>

³ *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2017)

Disabled individuals are more likely to be reliant on jobs in the retail and service industry sectors which were decimated in the last two years. In 2020, 1 in 5 workers with disabilities were dismissed from employment, compared with 1 in 7 in the general population.⁴ The disability community, even prior to COVID-19 faced significant barriers to housing, but are now facing a crisis where the supports that were put in place to alleviate the hardships brought by COVID-19 are faltering.

We have received many calls and complaints regarding issues with implementing COVID-19 rental assistance in Baltimore City. We have seen and are currently litigating cases where BCCAP did not cover all filings and cases for individuals. In other words, we have seen landlords continue to pursue evictions and refusing to dismiss previously entered warrants of restitution- despite having been paid rental assistance. We have also received complaints from tenants that their landlords are refusing to accept payment from BCCAP, despite Maryland having a Source of Income discrimination ban.⁵ Landlords should not be allowed to turn away rental assistance that is designed to keep people in their homes.

Furthermore, we have heard again and again from tenants with disabilities that they are unable to receive service if it is placed at the front of an apartment building. While many of us believe that the pandemic is winding down, that is not the case for many with disabilities. Many of these individuals continue to reside in their homes in quarantine to protect themselves. Refusing to make sure that a notice gets to a tenant's door is an accessibility issue and a due process issue for those who must remain inside.

Allowing evictions to continue will place those with disabilities in danger and can force those who are living independently into state institutions. The Disability Community includes those who have auto-immune disorders and are susceptible to the worst symptoms of COVID-19. It has also been found that people with learning disabilities have markedly increased risks of hospital admission and death from COVID-19, over and above the risks observed for non-COVID causes of death.⁶

Eviction for tenants with disabilities is not just a housing issue- it is a health issue. It is imperative that Baltimore City continue to take all necessary measures to minimize evictions.

Sincerely,
Corinne "Cory" Warren, Esq.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>

⁵ Md. Code, State Government, § 20-101, 20-704, 20-705

⁶ National Institute for Health Research , *Risks of Covid-19 Hospital Admission and death for People with Learning Disability*, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1592> (Published 15 July 2021)