



Testimony for 21-0036R-Informational Hearing-Avoiding an Eviction Crisis (ECD)

Mary Bradford on behalf of Beyond the Boundaries

Beyond the Boundaries is an Archdiocese of Baltimore program with members from churches throughout Baltimore City and the surrounding counties. We recognize the need for Catholic organizations to advocate for social justice, especially as it relates to stable and permanent housing. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has repeatedly stated that to effectively love our neighbor, we must care for the conditions in which they live, and we must acknowledge decent housing as a human right.¹ “Since decent housing is a human right, its provision involves a public responsibility.”² Such public responsibility includes providing Baltimore City tenant’s sustainable and effective eviction protection to avoid the wave of evictions that are likely to occur as a result of the expiration of the CDC’s eviction moratorium.

We believe the Baltimore City Council wants to keep people housed and avoid an eviction crisis, as evidenced by the existing rental assistance and eviction diversion programs developed by Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, as well as the Mayor’s office of Children and Family Success. However, we cannot ignore the countless pleas from organizations supporting tenants in court each day that there is disconnect between the relief available and tenants being able to successfully avoid eviction. More work must be done.

Beyond the Boundaries therefore stands in support with Baltimore Renters United’s call to action as set forth in its July 1, 2021 letter to Mayor Brandon Scott. We call on the City Council to improve the current eviction diversion program so that it provides timely remedies for applicants, while also working with the judicial system to ensure an effective connection between eviction diversion and relief programs and the judicial eviction process. We also call on the City Council to sign Council Bill 21-0031, Landlord-Tenant Lease Renewals, into law in order to protect renters from evictions based on lease non renewals. The City Council must also amend and extend the COVID-19 Renter Relief Act. Both of these legislative measures serve as essential tools necessary as the City continues to strengthen its eviction preventions programs.

Finally, we demand the Baltimore City Council to fully fund City Council Bill 20-465, Landlord-Tenant-Right to Counsel in Eviction Cases. We are grateful for the City Council for passing the Right to Counsel Bill. We know that having an attorney during these tumultuous times could prevent countless evictions. According to a recent report by Stout Risisus Ross, 80 percent of tenants could raise an eviction defense, but without an attorney, only 8 percent are able to successfully do so. In fact, In Baltimore City, 92 percent of represented tenants would avoid disruptive placement with a right to counsel. However, this must be fully funded in order to be effective.³

¹ <https://www.usccb.org/resources/right-decent-home-pastoral-response-crisis-housing>

² <https://www.usccb.org/resources/right-decent-home-pastoral-response-crisis-housing>

³ https://abell.org/sites/default/files/files/Baltimore%20RTC%20Report_FINAL_5_8_2020.pdf

Baltimore City Council must act now to provide meaningful eviction relief to tenants. As Pope Francis made clear during his visit to Washington DC in 2015, "There is no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for the lack of housing." As the Country celebrates a re-opening after Covid, we cannot let our most vulnerable citizens be left behind and homeless. Baltimore City must do more to ensure tenants remained housed.