



Renters Alliance Testimony
In Favor
Bill 18-20
Rent Increase Freezes During COVID-19 Emergency
April 21, 2020

Good Morning.

The Renters Alliance is strongly in favor of Bill 18-20 and thanks Council Member Will Jawando and the co-sponsors for proposing this necessary measure.

Bill 18-20 is a public health measure to stabilize rental housing during a statewide emergency declared by the Governor on March 5. As this Council is well aware, as of today, there have been more than 40,000 deaths nationally due to the virus pandemic in just last the last eight weeks, almost 100 of them in Montgomery County alone—and we know that death toll is rising. Governor Hogan and County Officials have put in place emergency measures to keep residents safe, among the most critical of these urges all residents to remain at home except for necessary travel for food, medicine and exercise.

Bill 18-20 is a necessary public health measure during a national and state emergency. This is no time for business as usual by those landlords choosing to raise rents and charge late fees, prompting housing instability for renters. Now is no time to prompt residents to move.

Despite the Apartment and Office Buildings Association urging its members to limit increases, we have seen no evidence at this time that its members are uniformly abiding by it. In fact, we are seeing increases proposed in February, March and April are being issued at the Blairs, Summit Hills, Coleville Plaza, The Grand, Inigos Crossing, the Enclave, Essex House, Quebec Terrace to name a few.

The amendments proposed by the landlords' association and their allies are not friendly amendments. Specifically:

The Renters Alliance opposes any amendment that allows for rent increases and does not waive late fees during this public health emergency. Any additional financial burden placed upon the renter population no matter where they are on the economic spectrum, only increases the possibility of destabilizing homes during a stay in place public health order.

An amendment to increase rents up to 5%--nearly twice the county's 2020 Voluntary Rent Increase Guidelines—would only further add to the potential instability and would ignore the objective of this bill—to keep renters stable and at home during this unprecedented health emergency.

Bill 18-20 is a modest, yet urgent, step that contributes to rental housing stability during a public health emergency.

We are sympathetic to the economic impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on everyone, including landlords, especially smaller landlords, and especially renters.

We urge the Council to go further and consider additional measures to subsidize rents for those directly economically impacted by the pandemic. We ask the Council to also consider additional required support for renters whose landlords are benefitting from mortgage forbearance, payroll protection loans and other subsidies not yet available for renters.

Thank you.