

Anna T Levy, Rockville, MD

**In Support of Expedited Bill 22-22, Landlord-Tenant Relations –
Limitations on Rent Increases
July 26, 2022**

My name is Anna T Levy, and I live in District 1. I am submitting this testimony in support of **Bill 22-22, Landlord-Tenant Relations – Limitations on Rent Increases.**

As a Jewish person, I am taught that tenant's rights are just as important as landlords' rights. We have an obligation to ensure fairness in tenant/landlord law, to ensure safe living conditions, and to prevent homelessness. The Book of Lamentations compares homelessness to the loss of a parent or spouse. Without a secure home, economic, health, social, and educational stability are jeopardized. By contrast, the establishment of a permanent home promises lasting security.

In April 2020, **Bill 18-20** was put in place to provide critical support to renters, who make up approximately 35-40% of County residents. The bill provided assurances that rent would not increase above the Voluntary Rent Guidelines (currently 0.4%) providing some additional housing stability to vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 health emergency. This bill expired on May 15, 2022, although the pandemic continues. Essentially, this means that landlords can raise rents without limit.

We know that rent costs in Montgomery County are already not affordable for many vulnerable community members who live with no financial safety net, many of whom are Black and Brown. With the expiration of the rent protections of Bill 18-20, the skyrocketing costs of rent in already high-rent Montgomery County, along with current inflationary costs for groceries, gasoline, and other needs of daily living, many more renters will be forced from their homes.

This bill will hold rent increases to 4.4% for an additional 6 months; effectively 9 months from the date of passage when 90-day notification requirements are considered. Stabilizing rent is not rent forgiveness, but it will help renters to plan for covering the bills that they know about without adding to their burden so that they can stay in their homes.

I am fortunate to be able to afford housing in a safe and stable neighborhood. But many of my neighbors in this wealthy County already pay 40 or 50% or more of their incomes toward rent. Large rent increases force people to search for difficult to find - more affordable housing, and in worst cases, to live in fear of, and face, eviction. Although high rents may attract wealthy residents and improve the County's tax base, they push out people who want to continue to live in, benefit from, and contribute to our communities. When a community becomes more and more unaffordable, longtime residents are forced to leave; destabilizing their immediate family's lives and their communities. Is this the Montgomery County that we strive to create? Montgomery County thrives on the diversity of our residents and we need to make sure that all of our residents can thrive.

I thank County Executive Marc Elrich and Councilmember Will Jawando for introducing this important bill and **urge the members of the Montgomery County Council to approve Bill 22-22 to help to keep people in their homes during this continued time of pandemic, which has disproportionately affected low-income Black and brown families and individuals.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this critical legislation.