

April 23, 2024
Devorah Stavisky
Silver Spring, MD, 20910

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL 7-24
Landlord-Tenant Relations – Tenant Protection and Notification

Dear Council President Friedson, Council Vice President Stewart, and members of the Council,

My name is Devorah Stavisky. I am a renter at the Blairs, in Downtown Silver Spring in District 4, where I have lived since 2019. As a community organizer with Jews United for Justice, I work to mobilize over 2,000 Jews and allies across Montgomery County to advance social and economic justice and racial equity in our local communities.

I celebrate this Council's commitment to creating safe, secure living for tenants in response to the tragic series of fires in multifamily units last spring, and thank Councilmember Stewart for introducing Bill 7-24, in addition to Councilmembers Balcombe, Sayles, Katz, Mink, Albornoz, and Jawando for your co-sponsorship. This bill will greatly improve the lives of me and my neighbors in large multifamily units in the County.

Jewish law understands that a house is more than simply a roof over one's head; a house must be safe, secure, and healthy. In the case of a rental property, the responsibility to provide such housing falls on the landlord. The Mishnah (a collection of Jewish law compiled in the 3rd century CE) stipulates that "the landlord bears the responsibility for providing the door, for providing the bolt, for providing the lock, and for providing every item in the house that is essential for living and requires the work of a craftsman to provide it." (Mishnah Bava Metzia 8:7) In other words, the landlord must create a safe, secure environment for the tenant.

Over the last four years, I have talked with hundreds of renters in Montgomery County about their housing conditions, oftentimes at their doors – often, in my own apartment complex, which is one of the largest in Downtown Silver Spring with over 1100 units across three buildings. Through these conversations, I have learned of worrisome gaps in my complex's albeit good service-provision that this bill would fix. We currently do not have an onsite, 24/7 representative to deal with emergencies. At least one building in my complex has plumbing so old, residents have shared stories of sewage flooding out of their showers when they flush, or of thick, black water flooding their kitchens over the weekends. And because of the lack of 24/7 service-provision, when these crises took place over the weekend or in the middle of the night, my neighbors had to look to other neighbors to help fix issues that required immediate management attention.

As our Apartment complex continues to engage in complex-wide maintenance projects that shut down water, electricity, and other essential services multiple times a month, my neighbors and I

would benefit from the specificity in notice required in this bill so we can plan accordingly for our work and living situations.

Most importantly, this bill would ensure that in the case of a fire emergency, the likes of which we saw over five times last spring, my neighbors and I will know that our management has a plan to keep us safe.

May Melanie Diaz's memory be for a blessing, and may this commonsense bill to ensure renters stay safe in our home pass quickly. Thank you.