



TESTIMONY
Montgomery County Council
In Favor of Bill 7-24 with Amendments - Tenant Protection and Notification

Emilee Towey, Outreach Coordinator, Montgomery County Renters Alliance, Inc.
April 23, 2024 at 1:30PM

Good afternoon Council President Friedson, Vice President Stewart and Council Members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Emilee Towey and today I am speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Renters Alliance as Matt Losak, our executive director, is unable to be here in person as he recovers from COVID 19.

The Renters Alliance is Maryland's first and only regional nonprofit dedicated exclusively to renter outreach, education, organizing, and advocacy. Since our founding in 2010, the Renters Alliance has been an unwavering advocate for expanding and strengthening renter protections. Bill 7-24 increases apartment community safety and quality of life through more effective and reliable landlord-tenant notification and safety planning. We are in strong support of this bill because it will protect tenants from a lack of information and lack of proper notification concerning fire prevention, renters insurance, and the disruption of essential services in the building. Requiring greater clarity and disclosure of renters' insurance stipulations in leases is a prime example. Too many renters simply do not realize that their renters insurance required by the landlord and included in the lease ONLY protects the landlord.

We would like to thank Vice President Stewart for sponsoring this important bill and recognizing the need for such legislation in Montgomery County. This bill will require landlords to provide tenants with vital information about emergency safety plans approved by DHCA, as well as access to a 24 hour phone number and building representative for emergency temperature control situations.

We have also raised with Vice President Stewart a friendly amendment that would improve the bill's impact: Too often crimes that occur in and around apartment communities occur without proper notice of the circumstances and follow up to the residents, leaving information about crimes subject to rumors and speculation, and in some cases, may leave residents prone to crime. We ask that notices of criminal activity and how it is being addressed also be tracked and communicated to residents. We note that in the past, such information was provided through DHCA's eproperties.

At the Renters Alliance, we often hear from tenants who are frustrated with the lack of notification from management when there are building-wide issues, especially related to maintenance, water, heat, and power disruptions. We listen to tenants who have experienced fires in their building, as we did when we worked with the residents of Arrive Wheaton and Silver Spring, who were confused about the procedures, and dismayed with the absence of accessible information and the preventative measures that were not put in place. Bill 7-24 intends to correct these rental housing shortcomings in order to safeguard the community's health, safety, and well-being.

By requiring leases to include pertinent information about insurance, automatic sprinklers, and safety plans, tenants can be better informed and more prepared for emergencies. With required notification of essential service disruption in the building and access to a 24 hour emergency representative, tenants can avoid unnecessary surprises about their home and feel safe and secure. We strongly urge the PHP Committee and the Council to prioritize tenant safety and vote in favor of this bill. Thank you.