

Testimony in Support with Amendments for Bill 8-24: Human Rights and Civil Liberties – Fair Criminal History and Credit Screenings

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

In my role as the Montgomery County Community Organizer for Jews United for Justice, I have since the summer of 2020 talked to hundreds of renters and homeowners across the County about their barriers to safe, affordable, and stable housing. JUFJ organizes members of Jewish communities and our allies to support racial and economic justice, and we've learned that **the implementation of the bills we pass is just as important as legislative change**. With that in mind, **we ask the council to support Bill 8-24, which will strengthen the implementation of the Housing Justice Act.**

JUFJ previously testified in support of the Housing Justice Act, and we thank Councilmembers Glass and Katz for spearheading the important legislation that aimed to eliminate the barriers of criminal record and credit screenings from rental applications. These screenings [disproportionately bar Black and Latinx renters, who are overpoliced and overrepresented in the criminal legal system, from accessing housing](#), according to the County's Office of Legislative Oversight.

[Our testimony then](#) asked you to ensure the Housing Justice Act not only codified the right to a fair rental application process, but made clear what the implementation would look like, and what penalties would be for landlords who fail to do so.

We're grateful for the leadership of Councilmember Laurie Anne Sayles in introducing Bill 8-24, which speaks directly to our concerns from 2020. **In particular, we want to share our support for the bill's:**

- Requirements for addendums that explain tenants' rights during the application process
- Requirements for clear, public signage in leasing offices for tenants to know their rights during the application process
- Transparency in requiring landlords to report their use of required credit and criminal history screening addendum in the annual rental housing survey
- Program monitoring through disaggregated data collection on rental application denials and related complaints

- Establishment of resources for the staffing and implementation of the bill through the Office of Human Rights (OHR). *We note that the Office of Legislative Oversight's Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement lifts this up in particular, writing that ["Increased resources for staffing in the Office of Human Rights through Bill 8-24 could reduce housing discrimination through allowing more focused enforcement of the Housing Justice Act."](#)*

We would also like to offer the following friendly amendments to further strengthen Bill 8-24 and the implementation of the Housing Justice Act:

- Provide any written materials about tenants' rights (application addendums, public signage, etc) in the County's top 7 languages
- Make it mandatory for landlords to fill out the annual rental survey, with clear penalties for landlords who fail to do so
- Include information on the penalties landlords face for failing to follow this bill in tenant know-your-rights materials stipulated in the bill

The book of *Pirkei Avot*, or the Ethics of the Fathers, teaches us that "it is not on us to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist from it." While we have a long road ahead to eliminate homelessness and disparities in housing, Bill 8-24 is a step in the right direction to ensure transparency, accountability, and resources for fair rental application resources. We thank the Council for considering our testimony, and we look forward to our continued work to guarantee housing for all.

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