

Bill 8-24_JoShifrin_FAV
Hearing Date: June 18, 2024
Jo Shifrin
Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON Bill 8-24 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

**Human Rights and Civil Liberties - Fair Criminal History and Credit Screenings -
Amendments**

TO: Chair Friedson, Vice Chair Stewart, and members of the Montgomery County Council

FROM: Jo Shifrin

OPENING: My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District I. I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 8-24.

The County Council passed the Housing Justice Act in 2021, which prohibits a housing provider from conducting during the rental application process, a criminal background check or credit history before making an offer for rent to a prospective tenant. Additionally, it prohibits the housing provider from inquiring into, or making housing decisions based upon, certain arrests or misdemeanors.

The Housing Justice Act is a good law. However, it lacks a process to ascertain if prospective rental applicants, who were denied rental housing, were informed of their rights during the application process. The law requires disclosure but lacks the ability to verify that a housing provider complied. Aggrieved renters who are denied rental housing can complain to the Office of Human Rights. But an applicant might never complain if they are not aware of their rights. Bill 8-24 corrects for these deficiencies in the Housing Justice Act.

Why is this revision needed?

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued guidelines in 2016 recognizing the disparate racial impact of housing policies that exclude people on the basis of criminal background.
- Studies consistently affirm that having a criminal record is a significant barrier to securing housing.
- People who are formerly incarcerated are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public.
- Housing insecurity is a significant factor associated with criminal recidivism.

- A study of Maryland's MOVE program found that addressing housing insecurity among the formerly incarcerated is beneficial to public safety.

As a Jew, my sense of justice is grounded in Jewish texts. The Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) is Judaism's foundational text. There is a tremendous amount of contemporary wisdom in these writings. In the book of Isaiah, Chapter 10 there is a passage that calls to those in the government to perform their duty to ensure justice and dignity for economically insecure members of their society.

Everyone should have housing adequate to their needs. If the formerly incarcerated are to put their lives back together, be gainfully employed, return to school, parent their children, and so forth, they need a fair chance to obtain a place to live.

Bill 8-24 will improve Montgomery County Housing law and will enable a disadvantaged group of people the chance to start over. I respectfully urge you to support Bill 8-24.