

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

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council,

This is Tino Fragale (he/him), one of Everyday Canvassing's co-directors. We are a local nonprofit that does door knocking and street talking everyday. In particular, we have had thousands of conversations with low to moderate-income renters and people experiencing homelessness across Montgomery County. Over the years, we have built relationships with and listened to thousands of residents and stood by their side in their pursuit of stable housing and fair treatment.

The individuals we serve at Everyday Canvassing are often the most vulnerable members of our community, facing numerous obstacles in their search for stable housing. Some have records with the legal system, and many have credit histories that do not accurately reflect their current circumstances or the rent they had consistently paid for years before a crisis, or potential as tenants. The implementation changes to the Housing Justice Act proposed in Bill 8-24 will provide more transparency and accountability for landlords to follow best practice in the application process.

We commend Councilmember Sayles' office for taking the lead on 8-24, which will meaningfully improve the implementation of the Housing Justice Act.

Support for Key Provisions

1. **Transparency in Rental Applications:** By requiring landlords to disclose their processes for criminal and credit screenings upfront, applicants can better understand the criteria being used to evaluate their applications. This transparency is important to ensure all applicants are aware of their rights and the standards to which they will be held.

2. **Notice Posting Requirements:** Mandating landlords to post notices regarding the prohibition of criminal history inquiries before a conditional offer is made will help ensure that potential renters are not unfairly disqualified based on their past before having a chance to prove their current suitability.

3. **Retention and Reporting of Addendums:** The requirement for landlords to retain and submit criminal and credit screening addendums as part of the annual rental housing survey enhances accountability. It ensures that there is a verifiable record of compliance with the law, protecting applicants from potential discriminatory practices.

4. **Annual Data Reporting:** Collecting and reporting disaggregated data on rental application denials and related complaints will provide valuable insights into the implementation and impact of these policies. It will enable ongoing monitoring and adjustment of strategies to ensure they are effectively promoting fair housing practices.

5. Investment in Staffing: A bill is only as strong as its implementation. We are glad that this bill will push for the needed staffing to successfully respond to complaints that surface when landlords don't follow best practice.

Recommended Amendments

1. We ask that all addendums and public notices of tenants' rights be shared in all of the County's top 7 languages.

2. We also ask that this bill add clarity to the Housing Justice Act's language of "credit scores *within commercial reason*," as credit screenings that don't reflect an applicant's ability to pay rent are one of the most common barriers to housing that we have seen when working with at-risk renters.

3. We ask that DHCA publicly share any violations of these rights on their incoming database about multiunit housing in the county.

As our County works to strengthen tenants' rights, we thank you for considering the swift passage and implementation of Bill 8-24. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure housing for all, as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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