



Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 154 –
Landlord and Tenant - Eviction Action - Right to Counsel
Judicial Proceedings and Budget and Taxation Committees
January 28, 2021

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly throughout the entire Greater Washington area to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents, support our Jewish day schools and community centers, and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the entire Jewish community.

The JCRC recognizes that the right to counsel has a myriad of benefits for tenants and the communities they live in. Studies have shown that tenants with legal representation are much more likely to avoid an eviction judgment than unrepresented tenants. Additionally, attorneys may be able to keep eviction filings off tenants' records, arrange for alternative housing, and help tenants apply for rental assistance. The JCRC is committed to equity and justice for all in legal proceedings, thereby ensuring tenants have the right to legal representation in any eviction-related case.

Senate Bill 154 states that certain individuals (someone who rents in a property owned, operated, or managed by a public housing authority and is a member of a household with an income that is not greater than 50 percent of the median income in the State) have a right to legal representation in eviction proceedings. The bill establishes the Right to Counsel in Evictions Coordinator to organize and direct services. SB 154 also provides a mechanism for outreach and education regarding tenants' rights. Evictions have a disparate impact on black and brown households in the State and exacerbate the public health crisis due to Covid-19. Providing a right to counsel to tenants in eviction cases is a proven means of preventing the disruptive displacement of families and the resulting social, economic, and public health costs of such displacement. For these reasons, we ask the committees to give a favorable report to SB 154.