

February 1, 2018

### No license? No rent!

#### Bill to expand rental licensing and inspections introduced in Baltimore City Council

All renters deserve safe, fair, and healthy homes. But half of Baltimore City rentals are not licensed or inspected for renting, leaving thousands of city residents on their own to deal with hazardous housing conditions. Why is this? Baltimore law only requires annual licensing and inspection for multi-family properties, not one- and two-unit properties. The Public Justice Center is advocating with other members of the Renters United coalition (Communities United, Jews United for Justice, Right to Housing Alliance, Baltimore Healthy Start, and more) for city legislation that would require all properties to undergo routine inspection and licensing with Baltimore Housing. On January 22, Baltimore City Councilman Bill Henry introduced a bill to make that a reality. The bill makes significant strides to protect renters while holding landlords accountable, and we have recommended several amendments that would strengthen the bill through added accountability and transparency measures. To learn more about the Renters United campaign, click here.

### When \$2 billion in stolen wages is only a “drop in the bucket”

#### Attorney Sulma Guzmán talks about the Economic Policy Institute’s new report and the PJC’s fight against wage theft

In December, the Economic Policy Institute released a report showing that \$2 billion in stolen wages were recovered in 2015 and 2016 by the U.S. Department of Labor, state labor departments and state attorneys general, and the ten largest class action lawsuits. Despite that staggering figure, the report describes it as a “drop in the bucket” of a much bigger problem.

The Public Justice Center’s Workplace Justice Project sees the impact of the wage theft epidemic every day as they represent workers seeking to recover unpaid wages. We sat down with PJC attorney Sulma Guzmán to talk about the EPI report and the PJC’s role in fighting wage theft.

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#### Welcome to new board members

We’re excited to welcome several new board members to the PJC. They bring a wealth of experiences and commitment to working for justice and equity. Welcome to: Jenny Egan, Ahmed Elsayed-Ahmed, Camille Blake Fall, Kenneth Jones, II, Michelle Mendez, Miriam Nemeth, Jordan Rosenfeld, Mehgan Sidhu, and Melvin Wilson. We’re glad to have you on board!

Filing your pro bono report? Remember the PJC!

## Landlords cannot evict tenants without fair warning, PJC brief asserts

When landlords believe that tenants have violated their lease and want to evict them before the end of a lease term, Maryland law has rules they must follow. These rules exist to protect tenants, providing a notice period before the landlord can file a breach of lease complaint. But landlords frequently disregard the law, and some courts go along with it.

After two lower courts allowed the landlord of a Public Justice Center client to short-circuit the notice period, PJC housing attorney Zafar Shah filed a petition for writ of certiorari, asking the Court of Appeals of Maryland to take up the issue. The Court granted the request in November 2017, and the following month PJC Murnaghan Appellate Advocacy Fellow K'Shaani Smith filed a brief on behalf of the tenant. The brief argued that district and circuit court rulings often undermine tenant protections and provide an incentive for landlords to violate the law. [Read about the brief here.](#)

Every year, Maryland attorneys report to the state on their pro bono activities. More than just a filing requirement, it's a time to celebrate the many ways that lawyers help people meet their basic needs through legal expertise and donations to civil legal aid organizations. We are so grateful to everyone who contributes to expanding access to justice. To make our collective impact event bigger, consider making a gift to the Public Justice Center when you file your pro bono report online by February 15. [Click here to file your pro bono report.](#)

**Your gifts help build a just society. Contribute here.**



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