

July 15, 2022

Office of the Mayor
250 City Hall, 100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202



Dear Mayor Scott:

We appreciate that the City Council cut the sheriff's budget by \$500,000 and reallocate those funds to Baltimore City's Right to Counsel program. And we are grateful for your support in reallocating those funds. We now urge you to release those funds to ensure the most effective implementation of the program.

As background, on November 16, 2020, the City Council unanimously passed Bill 20-0625, including sponsorship by you, which will provide the right to an attorney to renters facing eviction cases in Baltimore City. The Bill was signed into law on December 2, 2020 with an April 1, 2021 effective date. A number of community partners and stakeholders worked closely with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to implement the program and secure the allocation of phased funding to ultimately reach full implementation. The initial phase is funded through CDBG-CV funds in the amount of \$1.8 million to partly fund legal service providers.

We are grateful for DHCD's partnership with community organizations to begin implementation of the legislation. However, a crucial provision to the law and to the success of the Bill's intent and purpose remains unfunded. Tenant outreach and education provided by community groups and organizations have not received funding despite the proposed budgeting that the DHCD and community stakeholders have proposed. Reallocating this additional \$500,000 to outreach and education would be a great opportunity to not only further the mandates of the law but will also exponentially help efficacy of the program and its mission to ultimately reduce eviction and the violence of involuntary displacement.

As your office and City Council have rightly understood, right to counsel will provide housing stability for numerous families and individuals and lay the foundation for more equitable, safe and sustainable housing in Maryland, especially as we recover from the pandemic. Legal counsel will level the playing field for tenants in rent court as well as provide significant social and economic benefits to the City. Proactive community outreach and education will empower tenant households to assert their rights, avoid litigation and will connect households to resources, including legal counsel. The benefits of the law cannot be realized unless tenants and families facing eviction know about their right to an attorney and can be linked to the legal services necessary to avoid their displacement.

We look forward to working with you and your Administration to move forward on reallocating these funds to right to counsel, and we recommend reallocation specifically to tenant outreach and organizing, an aspect of the law that has not yet been funded.

Thank you for your consideration and we are happy to talk further.

Sincerely,
Baltimore Renters United

Baltimore Renters United is a coalition working towards a Baltimore in which all renters live in safe, affordable, and secure housing.