



CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

**Montgomery County Delegation Public Hearing
Economic Development Committee
December 9, 2019**

**Support for MC 12-20 – Montgomery County – Residential Leases –
Montgomery County Stable Homes Act (Residential Leases – Just Cause Eviction
and Eviction Reporting)**

Contact: Kate Stewart, Mayor, City of Takoma Park
kates@takomaparkmd.gov – 301-891-7100

Good evening Mr. Chair and members of the Delegation. I am Kate Stewart, Mayor of Takoma Park, testifying in favor of this bill on behalf of the City of Takoma Park.

As we have noted in previous testimony before the Montgomery County Delegation – both at Joint Priorities Hearings and in response to last year’s bill (MC 22-19) – we strongly support this legislation – the Montgomery County Stable Homes Act. Delegate Wilkins’ bill promotes stable housing by requiring a landlord to state a justifiable reason before evicting and displacing residents in the county.

This bill would help to correct the existing process, which is unbalanced and unfair, by prohibiting a landlord from displacing a tenant from leased property in Montgomery County, including the City of Takoma Park, without a just reason.

The City agrees with the reasonable causes identified in the bill. At the same time, it provides protections for renters against potential unfair treatment, discrimination, or surprises that could have far-reaching adverse impacts not only on individuals and families, but entire communities.

Matthew Desmond in his book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* wrote:

“It is hard to argue that housing is not a fundamental human need. Decent, affordable housing should be a basic right for everybody in this country. The reason is simple: without stable shelter, everything else falls apart....”

Involuntary displacement leads to:

- Job loss and economic instability
- Increased student mobility
- Loss and damage to personal property
- Homelessness
- Mental and physical health issues

Right now, it is too easy for families to be forced out of their homes with little or no ability to defend themselves. Tenants can be taken to court and displaced with virtually no reason provided. They are often without legal representation and have little chance of success against skilled attorneys.

City staff – and me personally – have witnessed firsthand the devastation of involuntary displacement on our residents. A lifetime of belongings quickly packed up or left on the street ruined by rain and snow. Older residents and young families quickly scrambling to find a place to stay. Children moved from one school to another. All of this negatively impacts not just these individuals and families but our whole community. The City has a number of assistance programs and staff ready to help and work we landlords to help people stay in their homes. But, we need this legislation to prevent involuntary displacement.

We want to be perfectly clear that this bill clearly outlines the process and justifiable reasons for evictions, and still permits landlords to continue to be able to evict a tenant who breaches their lease, engages in criminal activity, endangers other tenants, or does not pay their rent. As public servants, we all want to ensure that if anyone is being removed from their home, it is for good reason. We have an opportunity to make that happen.

The City of Takoma Park has a wide range of rental housing types, from large apartment complexes to small, multi-family buildings with only a few units. We

currently do not have protections from involuntary displacement, but would like to join jurisdictions across the nation that do.

For these reasons, Takoma Park supports and urges a favorable vote on MC 12-20 and thanks Delegate Wilkins for her work on this issue.