



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

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Media Contact:
Nicole Dvorak, Howard County Council, (410) 313-2456

Howard County Council Vice Chair and Chair File Emergency Legislation, *The Rental Protection and Stability Act (CB33-2020)*

Ellicott City, MD (April 24, 2020) – To help address the significant financial impact Howard County residents will suffer over the course of this unprecedented State of Emergency, Howard County Council Vice Chair Liz Walsh and Chair Deb Jung have filed emergency legislation to help protect and stabilize the County's tens of thousands of renting households and local businesses. *The Rental Protection and Stability Act* will prohibit residential and commercial landlords from increasing rents, unreasonably or arbitrarily decreasing promised services like electricity or water, terminating an existing lease, or making any other material changes to existing lease terms during any Governor-declared emergency and up to three months thereafter. Similar protections will apply to mobile home park residents.

On April 3, 2020, Governor Hogan announced a series of financial relief initiatives to assist millions of Marylanders facing economic hardships due to COVID-19. That relief includes a possible 90-days' deferral or even forbearance of mortgage payments, voluntarily provided by collaboration of Maryland's leading financial institutions. "For those of our constituents obligated to make monthly mortgage payments, Governor Hogan's announcement of the lenders' initiative to temporarily defer or forbear those payments came as welcome relief. I strongly recommend that every person eligible to make that request of their lender do so as soon as possible," stated Walsh. "But, to date, there's no corollary directly benefitting renters. I don't doubt that there are many landlords who have passed along that relief and more to their own tenants, but I worry that there are other landlords who won't, and some even who might seek to take economic advantage of their tenants even as evictions temporarily are stayed." Governor Hogan ordered temporary stays of both residential and commercial evictions, also on April 3, 2020.

According to a [2018 Howard County Rental Survey](#), 23,600 households rent homes in Howard County just in our professionally managed multifamily communities. "This bill doesn't solve the whole problem for struggling families by any means," Walsh admits. "To do that, the consensus is—according to every single industry player we asked—we need near-term, local rental assistance. Unfortunately, here in Howard County, the Council doesn't have the authority to do that."

"I am proud to introduce this emergency legislation with Council Vice Chair Walsh to assist renters during this time of financial uncertainty and strain," said Howard County Council Chair Deb Jung. "Over 16,500 Howard County residents have applied for unemployment benefits during the COVID-19 response period and I feel strongly that our residents who are living in economically difficult circumstances need the protection this bill will

provide. Allowing for a reasonable period of economic stability once this crisis is over will give financially unstable residents some breathing room while they get back on their feet.”

CB-33 was inspired by similar legislation introduced April 14, 2020 by the Montgomery County Council ([Expedited Bill 18-20](#)) in a coalition led by Will Jawando and including Council President Sidney Katz, Councilmember Craig Rice and Councilmember Nancy Navarro. An amended version of that bill passed last night.

“Yesterday we took an important step in helping Montgomery County renters by passing emergency legislation to limit residential rent increases during the current public health crisis. I’m heartened to see that these protections may be extended to even more Maryland residents. Renters are among our most vulnerable and deserve the stability of knowing that their housing is protected,” said Montgomery County Councilmember At-Large, Will Jawando.

Carol Ott, Tenant Advocacy Director for the [Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland](#), stated “I applaud this effort to enact protections for renters during (and after) this difficult time, particularly when many municipalities are doing nothing.” Ott further underscored that, “It is the responsibility of every government across the state to ensure the health and well-being of its citizens, and protecting tenants from predatory rent increases is part of that, along with protecting essential services like water, utilities, and access to internet—not just during the pandemic, but for the period of time after we attempt to return to a new, better, normal.”

The Council’s public hearing for CB-33 will take place Monday, May 18, at 7:00 pm. The opportunity to sign up to testify virtually for the public hearing will be available after the legislation is formally introduced on Monday, May 4 and will close Sunday, May 17 at 7:00 pm to accommodate the emergency procedural measures implemented by the Council. To sign up to testify, please visit the Council’s testimony sign up page [here](#). Written testimony can be emailed to the Council up through the date of the vote: councilmail@howardcountymd.gov.

The first opportunity for CB-33 to be voted on by the Council will be during the Council’s monthly Legislative Session on Monday, June 1, 2020 at 7:00 pm. If passed by the Council—because it is emergency legislation—the bill becomes effective immediately upon signature by the County Executive.

Click here to view the full text of the legislation: [The Rental Protection and Stability Act, CB33-2020](#).

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