



BRIAN E. FROSH, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

PRESS RELEASE

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Attorney General Frosh Announces Members to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force

BALTIMORE, MD – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today announced the membership of the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force. The Task Force was created in the 2021 legislative session by HB18, the passage of which made the Maryland General Assembly the second state legislature in the country to provide statewide access to counsel in eviction proceedings for income-eligible tenants.

Effective October 1st, the Task Force will be responsible for:

- evaluating the provision of services under HB18,
- studying potential funding sources, and
- making recommendations to improve the implementation of the access to counsel program, including necessary policy and statutory changes.

In June 2020, in partnership with the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, Attorney General Frosh created the Attorney General’s COVID-19 Access to Justice Task Force. That task force submitted nearly 60 significant legislative and policy recommendations to help Marylanders recover from the devastating impact of COVID-19. One of the recommendations of the Attorney General’s COVID-19 Access to Justice Task Force was to provide a right to counsel to defendants in eviction proceedings.

Providing a tenant facing eviction with access to counsel is crucial. The federal government has encouraged States and localities to use federal funds for housing stability services and eviction diversion programs, including legal assistance. Attorney General Frosh has urged the Hogan Administration to allocate federal funds to the Access to Counsel Program created by HB 18. Without action by the State, individual counties have been left to decide whether and to what extent to fund legal services.

“The Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force is the latest in our ongoing effort to connect households at risk of eviction with resources to keep people in their homes,” said Attorney General Frosh. “Now that State protections against eviction have expired, there is new urgency for legal assistance to help tenants navigate the myriad orders and resources that are available.”

Victoria Schultz, Associate Dean, University of Baltimore School of Law, Chair of the Task Force, said: “I am honored to have been asked to lead the task force comprised of subject matter experts from around our state. Through the task force, we hope to assure meaningful access to counsel for people facing eviction that will level the playing field and close an access to justice gap in our civil legal system.”

Counties that have devoted resources to legal services are seeing that providing tenants with representation has a significant impact. For example, Anne Arundel County Executive Stuart Pittman allocated both local and federal funds to develop an eviction prevention legal program in response to COVID-19. Initially, all 89 tenants who went to court with counsel through the program have avoided eviction. Attorneys also successfully got 160 deficient eviction filings made by a single landlord dismissed before tenants had to go to court.

By statute, the Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force consists of 15 members appointed by the Office of the Attorney General. Attorney General Frosh has selected the following members to serve:

Victoria Schultz, Task Force Chair

Latonya Abrom

Jason Butler

Jessica Kaufman

Luke Lanciano

Charisse Lue

Natalie McSherry

Pamela F. Newland

Kelley O’Connor

Pamela Cardullo Ortiz

Karla Rodriguez

Cathryn Paul

Deb Seltzer

Reena Shah

Stuart O. Simms

The Access to Counsel in Evictions Task Force must issue an annual report with its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. The Task Force’s first report is due on January 1, 2022.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2021/081721.pdf>