



Catholic Charities

SOCIAL CONCERNS • PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY

Legislative Education Group (L.E.G.)

SERVING MARYLAND'S VULNERABLE POPULATIONS FOR OVER 30 YEARS

February 2008

RENTAL ALLOWANCE PROGRAM

Dear L.E.G. Member:

The Maryland General Assembly is considering a bill that would repeal a helpful program that assists low-income Marylanders with rent payments. We write asking you to encourage legislators to support House Bill 231 *with amendments* to guarantee benefits to these low-income households. The proposal is HB 231 Department of Housing and Community Development-Community Development Administration-Rental Assistance Programs.

Background:

- The Rental Allowance Program (RAP) provides rent subsidies to low-income individuals and families who are either homeless or have an emergency housing need.
- To qualify, assisted households must earn no more than 30% of the statewide or area median income, whichever is higher.
- The amount of monthly assistance ranges between \$170 to \$730 per month, depending on family size and geographic location within Maryland.
- Currently, assisted households must demonstrate a probability of attaining self-sufficiency within 12 months, and generally, subsidies last for no more than 12 months.
- In fiscal 2007, RAP served 637 households.
- In a 2007 survey completed by the Maryland Alliance for the Poor, over 50% of respondents identified housing assistance or affordable housing as the support they most wish they or their clients could access.

What HB 231 does as it is written:

- Repeals the current RAP law.
- Gives the Department broad authority to establish rental assistance programs to serve a number of groups – including people with disabilities, disaster victims, and others with a critical housing need – with no specific income limits for assistance.
- States the General Assembly's intent that the RAP program continue.

Amendments are needed to preserve Maryland's critical safety net.

The amendments would:

- Keep RAP in the law and affirm the State's commitment to serving the housing needs of low-income Marylanders.
- Allow for both RAP and the Department's desire to develop rental assistance programs to serve other groups.
- State the General Assembly's intent that the Department work with advocates and consumers to improve RAP.

Why Support HB 231 With Amendments?

- Addressing other groups' needs should not - and need not – come at the expense of Marylanders least able to afford the basic human need for shelter.
- Especially now, the housing needs of low-income Marylanders are not lessening; the State's commitment to the safety net that serves those needs should not lessen either.

What you can do to help TODAY...Encourage the Chairwoman and members of the Environmental Matters Committee to pass the bill only with amendments to keep in the law the State's commitment to serving low-income households.

Enclosed is a list of legislators on the Environmental Matters Committee. If one of your legislators is on the committee, please address your letter to him or her. If not, please contact Chairwoman McIntosh. To find out who your legislators are go to <http://mdelect.net/>

A "Sample Alert Letter" is enclosed on the following page.

This week, we have the opportunity to encourage legislators to assist Maryland's most vulnerable individuals and families. Your action is valuable to each household that struggles with making ends meet while earning a low income.

Sincerely,



Allison Stone
Catholic Charities L.E.G. Coordinator

Every citizen also has the responsibility to work to secure justice and human rights through an organized social response.

~Economic Justice for All

S A M P L E " A L E R T " L E T T E R

February 8, 2008

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh
Chair, House Environmental Matters Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

**RE: HB 231 – Department of Housing and Community Development –
Community Development Administration – Rental Assistance Programs.
SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
to maintain the State's commitment to serving low-income Marylanders.**

Dear Chairwoman McIntosh:

As a Maryland citizen who cares about the critical housing needs in our communities, I support HB 231 to provide broad authority to the Department of Housing and Community Development to meet a wide range of rental housing needs. Unfortunately, by repealing the current Rental Allowance Program (RAP), the bill also erodes our State's commitment to serving low-income Marylanders. I urge you, therefore, to adopt amendments to the bill so that RAP always remains a part of the critical safety net.

I know from my experience as [a volunteer, employer, or _____] that low-income families and individuals struggle to pay for housing in Maryland because rents and home prices are so high. Maryland is the 7th least affordable state in the country for renters.

The RAP helps households otherwise capable of maintaining a stable living arrangement to bridge the gap between their resources and their roof. A family eligible for the program could probably afford to pay \$583 a month in rent, but the fair market rate in this area is \$1,044. Amendments to HB 231 that keep RAP in the law will help make sure this vital assistance remains available to those in need.

I urge you and your Committee to give HB 231 a report of Favorable with Amendments.

Thank you for considering my views.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Address

Environmental Matters Committee

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