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Statement from District Court of Maryland Chief Judge John P. Morrissey

September 20, 2016

The District Court of Maryland appreciates the effort of Maryland Legal Aid in preparing its analysis of the Landlord/Tenant Court, also referred to as rent court. The report, *Human Rights in Maryland's Rent Courts: A Statistical Study*, recognizes the opportunities and challenges faced by the courts in ensuring that landlord/tenant related proceedings are fair and equitable.

Many of the concerns raised in that study will be addressed as the Judiciary modernizes its case management and records system. Currently, landlord/tenant cases are processed manually; however, within the next several years, landlord/tenant case data will be part of the Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC) initiative, an automated case management system that provides an efficient and cost-effective way to receive filings while improving the management of court records. The overall result will be more accurate, complete, and transparent records.

Since 2012, the year that was examined in the Legal Aid report, the District Court has implemented or expanded several new initiatives to improve the experience of those who have cases in rent court, ensuring that landlord/tenant operations are fair and accurate. For example, in Baltimore City, the Public Justice Center (PJC) provides free legal consultation on a daily basis to any self-represented litigant with a tenant matter. In addition, the Judiciary supports a Just Advice Clinic, which is staffed by volunteer attorneys and law students from the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. The clinic provides free legal advice and information about pro bono programs citywide. Judges also volunteer for "Landlord/Tenant 101" seminars, which are free to attend, to help inform the public about landlord/tenant court, as well as parties' rights and responsibilities.

The District Court is dedicated to improving services, employing best practices, and expanding the use of technology. To that end, information regarding the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and tenants is available online at www.mdcourts.gov, as well as at clerks' offices in every District Court. In addition, a series of self-help videos on topics such as landlord/tenant proceedings are displayed at courthouses and can be viewed online.

Recently, the District Court has implemented a pilot program to expand mediation services for all participants in rent court. In this pilot program, a trained mediator assists the parties to reach a collaborative solution to the issues presented in their case.

This summer, Baltimore District Judge Mark Scurti is serving as chair of a legislative sponsored work group, the Rent Court Work Group. This workgroup includes interested stakeholders who are reviewing the statewide landlord/tenant processes and procedures now in place and will make suggested improvements to the entire rent court system.

On behalf of the District Court of Maryland, I thank Maryland Legal Aid for its work in analyzing rent court. I look forward to a continued dialogue and the implementation of further improvements that will benefit all Marylanders.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John P. Morrissey".

John P. Morrissey
Chief Judge
District Court of Maryland