

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Office of the County Executive
"Fulfilling the Promise"



Angela D. Alsobrooks
County Executive

BILL: House Bill 206 - Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

SPONSORS: Delegates Krimm, Valentino-Smith, Arikan, Bartlett, Acevero, Anderson, Bagnall, Carr, Ciliberti, Conaway, D.M. Davis, W. Fisher, Haynes, Hettleman, C. Jackson, M. Jackson, Kerr, Lehman, Lopez, McKay, Moon, Palakovich Carr, Pippy, Proctor, Rosenberg, Shetty, and Solomon (By Request - Workgroup to Study Shelter and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Minors)

HEARING DATE: January 29, 2020 at 1:00 PM

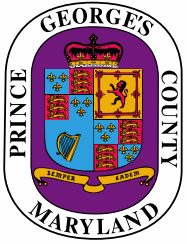
COMMITTEE: House Appropriations

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 410-261-1735

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 206 - Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services**, which provides homeless unaccompanied minors the legal capacity to consent to admission to emergency shelter. HB 206 also requires shelter providers serving such minors to register with the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development; to notify parents or guardians; and to notify child welfare agencies of any suspected abuse or neglect. Finally, HB 206 establishes that shelter providers are not legally liable solely due to serving a minor, but remain liable for any negligence or intentional bad acts.

Prince George's County has been serving unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) since 2013 and recognizes the critical importance of the secondary safety net that homeless providers create for youth experiencing housing instability and/or literal



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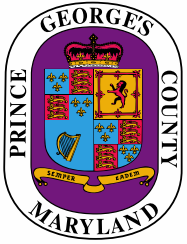


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homelessness who are disconnected from a caring adult and who do not meet the definition of abuse or neglect for Child Protective Services or receive any other type of housing support. Annually, the County's UHY system serves an average of 115 youth (48 of which present as minors) with immediate shelter safety significantly reducing the likelihood of them falling prey to human trafficking and other exploitation. Many of the youth assisted by this system (73%) reunify with their families or exit shelter with a permanent and safe housing plan that allows them to flourish.

Many of the youth we serve in our UHY system have runaway, are extracted from trafficking and/or gang networks, are immigrants discharged from federal systems without appropriate documentation to access services and/or youth who fear and avoid traditional systems responses. In any given month, our public safety and child welfare systems report 35-45 minors as AWOL or on runaway and last year alone our County was host to more than 600 "sponsor" discharges from the federal system, some of whom were able to reconnect to services through a UHY shelter. To bridge that gap and collectively provide as broad a safety net as possible, our UHY and Child Protective Services systems work hand in hand to ensure all minors are protected – including those who lack access to child welfare services – and to provide multiple access points with trusted and trained adults for those youth to ensure they get connected to the services *and systems* they need.

As a result of this innovative work, the County was appointed to the Workgroup to Study Shelter and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Minors and helped draft the revised HB 206 language before you in partnership with several advocacy, local, state and legislative representatives. While existing State law and regulations do not prohibit shelter services to minors and there are several federally funded emergency shelters for minors that have operated successfully in three Maryland counties for years, neither do these laws affirmatively establish that minors have the legal capacity to consent to shelter or other housing services. In practice, this means that only a limited number of shelter providers are willing to serve minors due to liability concerns and no State agencies award grants for shelter services for minors.



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HB 206 as drafted would provide the legal framework for a larger body of homeless youth systems to provide an immediately accessible, safe space where professionals can ensure that minors who might otherwise remain unknown to the child welfare system are connected to that system or, in the event the minor does not meet eligibility criteria for child welfare services, the shelter provider can continue to provide safe accommodations and services to protect and serve these vulnerable minors in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 206** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.