



**HB 206 Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter  
and Supportive Services**  
*House Appropriations Committee*  
January 28, 2020

*Submitted by Margo Quinlan and Stacey Jefferson, Co-Chairs*

**Member Agencies:**

- Advocates for Children and Youth
- Baltimore Jewish Council
- Behavioral Health System Baltimore
- CASH Campaign of Maryland
- Catholic Charities
- Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
- Family League of Baltimore
- Fuel Fund of Maryland
- Health Care for the Homeless
- Homeless Persons Representation Project
- Job Opportunities Task Force
- League of Women Voters of Maryland
- Loyola University Maryland
- Maryland Catholic Conference
- Maryland Center on Economic Policy
- Maryland Community Action Partnership
- Maryland Family Network
- Maryland Hunger Solutions
- Paul's Place
- Public Justice Center
- St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
- Welfare Advocates

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The Maryland Alliance against Poverty (MAP) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 206, which establishes that unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness have legal capacity to consent to emergency shelter and supportive services.

**Unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness in Maryland lack access to emergency shelter and housing resources, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and other harms.** Public school systems across the state identify thousands of students experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian each year, yet shelter options for unaccompanied minors are extremely limited. Only three Maryland jurisdictions have shelters for minors – Baltimore City, Prince George’s County, and Charles County – all of which are funded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. These existing programs have extremely limited bed space. As a result the majority of unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness lack access to immediately accessible safe spaces. This puts them at risk of trafficking and other abuse, school dropout, poor mental and physical health outcomes, and other harms.

**HB 206 will establish that unaccompanied minors have legal capacity to consent to shelter admission and services, and accordingly will result in the creation of additional resources for unaccompanied minors.** Maryland law is silent as to whether community-based sheltering programs may lawfully serve unaccompanied minors. As noted above, a few emergency shelters for minors have operated effectively in Maryland for years. However, other organizations typically decline to serve unaccompanied minors due to concerns about legal liability. HB 206 came about because such organizations requested clarity in the law. These organizations have indicated that they intend to move forward with providing shelter for unaccompanied minors when the legislation is enacted.

**HB 206 is consistent with federal law and practices of federally-funded shelters for minors currently operating in Maryland.** HB 206 includes provisions related to parental notification, mandatory reporting of suspected abuse or neglect, and service provider liability. These provisions essentially codify current practice in Maryland and are consistent with the federal law governing youth shelters funded pursuant to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

**MAP appreciates your consideration and urges support for HB 206.**

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*Maryland Alliance against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.*