



Testimony in Support of House Bill 206

Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

TO: Chair McIntosh, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee
FROM: Demaune A. Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore
DATE: January 28, 2020

Family League of Baltimore (Family League) strongly supports House Bill 911, which establishes that unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness have the right to consent to emergency shelter. The bill would establish that an unaccompanied minor in need of shelter has the same capacity as an adult to consent to shelter and supportive services, thereby incentivizing non-profit organizations to shelter this extremely vulnerable and underserved population.

Maryland participates in Youth REACH, an annual survey of youth who may be experiencing homelessness or housing instability. In the 2017 Youth REACH survey, 1,219 of the youth surveyed were under 25 and unstably housed or homeless; 714 (59%) of these youths were in Baltimore City.¹ Those surveyed disproportionately identified as LGBTQ (23% of those surveyed, compared to 7% of the general population), were predominantly African American (68%), and only 28% reported being enrolled in school. A key finding of the Youth REACH report was, “(t)he lack of income sources and full-time employment reported by youth indicates a need for employment support services and job training for youth as a means to prevent homelessness.”²

Additionally, 26% of the youth reported being parents, and 4% were pregnant at the time of the interview.³ Stable housing plays a significant role in the wellbeing of new mothers. The Baltimore City Child Fatality Review has determined that housing instability significantly contributes to low birthweight and preterm birth — the leading cause of infant death in Baltimore City — at seven times the risk.⁴

This past year, Family League invested in workforce readiness and rapid re-housing services for Baltimore City youth experiencing homelessness. Within the first year, 94% of youth ages 18 to 24 enrolled in the rapid re-housing program remained housed while receiving services. While shelters are not a solution, we do recognize the vital and life-saving role that shelters can play in lieu of an adequate supply of affordable housing for youth, including parenting youth who are experiencing homelessness.

¹ Harburger, D., Miller, A., Unick, J. (November 2017). *Maryland Youth Count 2017: A Report on the Findings from Youth REACH MD's Second Survey of Unaccompanied Youth & Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness*. The Institute for Innovation & Implementation, University of Maryland School of Social Work.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Costa, Cathy (2012). *The Need for Stable Housing For Pregnant Women And Babies In Baltimore*.

<http://www.healthybabiesbaltimore.com/uploads/file/pdfs/Housing%20Instability%20and%20Birth%20Outcomes.pdf.pdf>

As the designated Local Management Board for the City of Baltimore, Family League’s mission is to serve as an architect of change by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. This work is guided by the State’s 8 Child Well-being Results Areas. We support HB 911 in particular because of its alignment with these result areas by working to ensure that “Babies are Born Healthy,” “Children are Healthy,” “Families are Safe and Economically Stable,” and “Youth Have Opportunities for Employment or Career Readiness.”⁵

For more information contact Margo Quinlan, Public Policy Manager, at mquinlan@familyleague.org.

⁵ Maryland Governor’s Office for Children. “Maryland’s Child Well-Being Scorecard.” <https://goc.maryland.gov/reportcard/>