

SUPPORT – HB 206: Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter –

Consent to Shelter and Supportive Service

House Judiciary Committee, January 28, 2020

Testimony of Alia Marra

Dear Committee:

My name is Alia Marra, and I am 21 years old. I am currently a member of the Youth Action Board of the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services in Baltimore City. I am a mother of a two-year-old and I am currently expecting. I was also connected to foster care for four years, and I am currently experiencing homelessness. Because of my experiences and identities I have an intimate understanding of navigating being a homeless youth in Baltimore City.

I am in support of HB 206 because regardless of the circumstances leading up to homelessness minors still need access to basic care. Currently, there is only one youth-centered shelter in Baltimore City. In addition to this Youth Empowered Society (YES) is one of the few youth-oriented service providers in the city. This bill acts as harm reduction for youth because youth experiencing homelessness do not have legal access to necessary resources such as housing, transportation, case management, etc. Because of this youth are often coerced into harmful situations in order to survive. If given the right to consent to shelter and supportive services, there will be less exploitation of youth and less youth experiencing homelessness.

In addition to this, having the right to consent to shelter opens up an opportunity for youth to develop a good rapport with older adults who have access to resources. This allows for relationship-building so that traumatic situations can be shared safely, and a course of action can be developed which could lead to remediation with parents or legal guardians. This bill acts as a preventative measure for youth experiencing homelessness and will create a path to developing necessary life skills while giving youth the right to choose where they want to be.

This bill acts as both harm reduction and grants youth in Baltimore access to their basic right to choose. Currently youth have little to no options when it comes to escaping the violence of poverty and advocating for themselves. If this bill is passed it will lead to improving the quality of life for minors and mending broken relationships as well as opening the door to creating more youth centered resources in the state. As this bill could critically lessen the number of homeless youth in Baltimore I believe it is a good step forward in the fight against youth homelessness and I support it wholeheartedly.

Thank you,

Alia Marra
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