

**SUPPORT – HB 206: Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter –
Consent to Shelter and Supportive Service**

House Judiciary Committee, January 28, 2020

Testimony of the Youth Empowered Society

Dear Committee:

I am the Youth Leadership and Advocacy Coordinator at the Youth Empowered Society (YES Drop-in Center) located in Baltimore, Maryland. I am writing you in support of HB 206 on the behalf our staff, the resilient 316 youth that we serve on a yearly average and an average of 30 youth daily; in addition our agency's mission, which is to end youth homelessness in a city that recent reports estimate encompasses 1,600 youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

One of YES's most important strategies to support youth is providing “bridge” services between unaccompanied youth and housing opportunities and supportive services. Providing direct services to youth experiencing homelessness through trauma-informed, peer and ally support; leadership and employment readiness; and partners with youth to advocate for systems change – focusing on both immediate needs as well as long-term stability.

HB 206, like YES is also a bridge. It is simply an alternative to state agencies and the support that they too provide unaccompanied youth. It is a preventive measure. An option that could exist for the 13/14-year-old who at 21 years of age becomes a part of the 41% of young people who seek opportunities for shelter and supportive services offered at our center once they've exited the foster care system. This bill has been developed and strategized by on the ground agencies, youth voice and input, and we encourage that, that should be strongly considered in your decision making.

The youth of YES, and young people who share their experiences across the state deserve alternatives, prevention, and options. As active staff member of this drop-in center we are experts of our own daily interactions, the struggles, cries, and pleading for assistance from young people; we urge that the need for options are true. They are in need of legislation that considers, empowers, and uplifts their unique circumstances, and today you can vote I support of all three.

Thank you so much for your consideration and attention to this matter.

Best,

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