

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY  
IN SUPPORT OF  
HB 231: Housing Opportunity Made Equal (HOME) Act**

**Environment and Transportation Committee  
February 4, 2020**



**Health Care for the Homeless fully supports HB 231**, which would prohibit landlords and other property owners from discriminating against persons seeking housing based on their “*source of income.*”

For nearly 40 years Health Care for the Homeless has supported thousands of adults and families in their struggle to find safe and secure homes in the Baltimore metropolitan area. In recent years, we have witnessed Montgomery, Frederick and Howard Counties, along with Frederick, Annapolis and Baltimore City recognize that they must do more to help vulnerable families access housing. They, along with 91 other cities and counties across the country, have all passed laws to eliminate housing discrimination based on legal source of income. However, the state of Maryland still allows this discrimination to exacerbate the crisis of homelessness. This is immoral and illegal.

The passage of a statewide HOME Act would send a clear signal to states across the country that Maryland is committed to making improvements in the dramatic health, wealth, and education disparities furthered by discriminatory housing laws. Maryland can be a leader in ensuring access to safe, secure housing, regardless of a family’s source of income—because a safe place to call home is necessity for all, not a luxury for the few.

Housing is the proven first-line response to fixing dramatic health disparities across populations. This law would ensure fairness for seniors, working-class families, veterans, single mothers, low-wage workers, and those with disabilities seeking housing, all of whom are disproportionately affected by source of income discrimination. In Maryland, 60% of voucher households rely on SSI, social security or pensions; 39% include children; and 42% are single mothers with children. These are tens of thousands of Maryland individuals and families—and this law would ensure better housing and economic opportunities for all of them. As voucher holders are often concentrated in areas historically disinvested in, this law would deconcentrate poverty and create more mixed income housing and affordable housing.

Even if a family is lucky enough to secure a housing voucher, landlords can choose to turn them away. Perversely, families lose their vouchers if they cannot find housing within a certain period of time. In other words, even if a family is poor enough to receive housing assistance and even if a voucher is available, *landlords* have power to deny them housing. This could be simply because a landlord does not want to accept government funds. And it could be because of stereotypes concerning the recipients of public assistance. In either case, it results in discrimination that creates or prolongs homelessness.

This law does not take away the rights of a landlord to determine a renter can comply with lease terms and pay rent by verifying a renter’s source and amount of income or evaluating the renter’s tenant history and income stability. Further, this bill does not prevent a landlord from refusing income sourced from criminal

activity. Another myth pertaining to this bill is that it would halt housing and economic development—proved untrue by the success of other jurisdictions who have passed similar legislation.

Maryland has the chance to join 16 other states in putting a stop to the long history of discriminatory housing laws. **The time to end source of income discrimination in Maryland is now. Health Care for the Homeless strongly urges a favorable report for HB 231.**

*Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit [www.hchmd.org](http://www.hchmd.org).*