

House Bill 577
Homeless Shelter Licensing Program – Establishment
Environment & Transportation Committee
February 14, 2024
Support with Amendments

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB 577, with amendments, which establishes a homeless shelter licensing program within the Department of Housing and Community Development, requiring operators to meet standards for conditions, services, and protections of residents to obtain a state license permitting them to run a shelter.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As the second largest human services provider in the state, Catholic Charities of Baltimore offers comprehensive support to individuals facing homelessness and poverty. At Sarah’s House in Anne Arundel County, we provide vital services including emergency shelter and project-based supportive housing, alongside a variety of other resources for families experiencing homelessness. Serving up to 125 people daily, with half being children, our mission is to foster positive change within families by delivering a diverse range of services and support.

We support the goal of this bill, ensuring that all homeless shelters in Maryland provide safe, accessible shelter for those in need. However, we ask that this bill be amended to address the following concerns:

1. To meet the need for additional overnight shelter during the winter months, Anne Arundel County coordinates a collaborative effort that involves many interfaith organizations making their facilities available on a rotating basis for overnight shelter for homeless individuals. The program, called “Winter Relief,” has been in place for many years. More than 60 churches and synagogues volunteer to help for at least one week per year, providing overnight shelter and free meals for homeless individuals in need. This is a resource our county relies on to meet critical needs that otherwise could not be met. We are concerned that Winter Relief would be adversely affected by the new licensing requirements. Standards may be out of reach for the locations and/or the inspection and other administrative requirements may cause the locations to withdraw from participation. **We would like to see an amendment to this bill that would specifically exempt Anne Arundel County’s Winter Relief Program from being covered by the legislation** or that would specifically address the concerns noted above.
2. At Sarah’s House, located in Anne Arundel County, we are subject to regulations imposed by the Department of the Army, which may conflict with regulations adopted by this bill. We would like to propose an amendment that addresses this issue.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities urges the committee to issue a favorable report, with amendments, to address the concerns noted above on House Bill 577.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy