



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB 577

February 16, 2024

TO: Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 577 – Department of Housing and Community Development –
Homeless Shelter Licensing Program - Establishment

POSITION: OPPOSE

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **opposes** House Bill (HB) 577.

HB 577 would establish a homeless shelter licensing program in the Department of Housing and Community Development, which would compel the Department to develop minimum standards for homeless shelters across the state. In its current form, this bill would impact our community's ability to provide emergency shelter as a result of the outlined operational and administrative requirements.

Emergency shelter activated in response to extreme weather situations would not be exempted from this legislation as written. Although this might be helpful as a long-term strategy to promote equitable, fair, and safe shelter services, the licensing requirements would be difficult for agencies to implement and could greatly reduce the number of emergency shelters in our community in the short-term. The current providers in our shelter system would require additional training, technical assistance, and a significant amount of time and funding to become compliant under this new system. The City of Baltimore would risk having shelters close or pare down operations, which would decrease services in an environment that is already unable to meet the level of current and expected need. Without adequate administrative support, financial resources, and an implementation strategy for local organizations, many of our providers would cease operations while the need for emergency shelter is critically high.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request an **unfavorable** report on HB 577.