



**TESTIMONY SUBMISSION FOR DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT – HOMELESS SHELTER LICENSING PROGRAM**

**HB0577**

Hello and thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Sandy Washington, and I am the Chief Executive Officer at *LifeStyles of Maryland Foundation, Inc.* I also serve as the Chair of the Southern Maryland Local Homelessness Coalition, which is Southern Maryland's regional Homeless Board serving Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties. I am not speaking on behalf of that Committee; however, I am providing insight based upon my experience in serving vulnerable populations for over forty years.

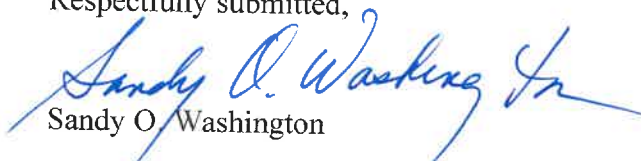
I have reviewed the draft bill submitted and want to show our agency's support for this bill. *LifeStyles* has operated emergency and transitional shelter programs for almost twenty years. We have operated hypothermia shelter programs, hotel sheltering, domestic violence safe housing, and have collaborated throughout the years with other agencies who also offer shelter programs. *LifeStyles* understands the need to provide a safe, equitable and appropriate shelter for all persons who are presently in need. This includes providing appropriate accommodations for those with disabilities and those who have service animals, as well as offering shelter based upon gender identity. While there are a number of well-meaning individuals and organizations providing shelter, those that are privileged to receive guidance and technical assistance from experts in this field are better prepared to serve this population.

In an effort to assure all persons who are a part of this vulnerable population receive equitable accommodations, this bill is essential. We agree that there needs to be basic standards for all shelters to operate, regardless of their funding sources. Over the years, we have seen shelters who are unable to accept persons because their shelter will not provide ADA accommodations, the separation of intact households, and places that are unclean and may be considered unsafe. We understand that a committee will be formed to help with the development of the licensing requirements. We hope that the committee will be diverse, representing all areas of the state and types of shelter programs. This licensing process should provide training, technical assistance and additional financial support to assist shelters in becoming compliant based upon these new standards.

**We ask that you vote favorably for HB0577.** We know that the policy, once implemented, will provide sufficient time for shelters to obtain compliance while not jeopardizing the safety of residents.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate the opportunity to share this feedback as you make a decision to represent all Marylanders.

Respectfully submitted,



Sandy O. Washington

Chief Executive Officer, LifeStyles