



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 577**

**Department of Housing and Community Development –  
Homeless Shelter Licensing Program - Establishment**

**Environment and Transportation Committee**

**FAVORABLE**

TO: Hon. Marc Korman, Chair; Hon Regina T. Boyce, Vice-Chair; and the Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth Phelps, Jr., The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

DATE: February 16, 2024

The Episcopal Church teaches that the basic necessities of health care, education, nutrition and housing are human rights, and we are obligated by the inclusive and unconditional love that is shown to us to do no less for all of our neighbors. While we urge the General Assembly to do all in its power to ensure that every resident has access to shelter, we also realize that safety, privacy and dignity must be upheld and maintained.

It is critical that the shelters to which we direct people treat them well and meet some basic standards for adequate shelter. This bill established a homeless shelter licensing program in the Department of Housing and Community Development that would require all homeless shelters to be licensed and comply with certain operational and building standards for homeless shelters and minimum standards for the protection of the rights of shelter residents.

The Diocese of Maryland is very concerned about opposition to the bill largely because it prohibits discrimination based on protected classes that include gender identity and sexual orientation, and because shelters would not be allowed to mandate attendance at religious services as part of their program requirements. We urge the Assembly to resist this opposition and ensure that the benefits provided are both universal in scope and unconditional.

The Diocese of Maryland requests a Favorable report