



February 14, 2024

Testimony for HB0577

I am the Executive Director of a homeless shelter and transitional housing program in Easton, MD. Talbot Interfaith Shelter (TIS) is an organization committed to ending homelessness on Maryland's Mid-Shore by providing Shelter, Stability, Support, and a path to Success, fostering inclusivity and respecting individuality, while collaborating with diverse religious faith groups and community organizations to ensure that everyone - regardless of ancestry, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, military status, veteran status, or disability - has access to safe, secure housing and the resources needed for sustainable self-sufficiency.

TIS serves families in Easton's Promise at 107 Goldsborough Street and singles at Evelyn's Place at 109 Goldsborough Street. These are beautiful and historic homes where our guests experience living in a very homey, clean and warm atmosphere. Our S4 Program (Shelter, Support, Stability, Success) is proven to assist people who are grappling with the traumas of homelessness to turn their lives around and to become contributing members of our community. We educate our guests in life skills—balancing a budget, saving money, parenting, staying sober, and many more topics that give them the tools they need to dig out of the poverty pit. We have 15 transitional apartments where guests who graduate the shelter program may be invited to participate in our two-year Transitional Housing Program, where rent starts out very low (usually \$400-\$500 per month) and their portion gradually increase until they are paying the full rent for the unit, and TIS no longer has to subsidize.

While I am certainly not opposed to becoming licensed with the State, and am open to bi-annual inspections, I do not want the State to dictate our policies. In the physical space in which TIS exists, and with the support of our community, we help our vulnerable neighbors who want to change their lives for the better—not just wanting to be housed overnight. I am concerned that if the State mandates that we cannot screen our applicants for violent crimes, drug distribution and use, our program will suffer and we will turn into just another overnight shelter 'crash pad'. We have promised our neighbors that we run background checks and that our facilities are alcohol and drug free. At this time, we are successful in raising the \$1.4 M per year to keep our facilities and educational programs running smoothly, without the help of Government funds, and if we will be required to change our policies, I fear the community will no longer support us and that we may need to shutter our shelters.

Please be very careful when voting on this Bill. It could adversely affect many shelters in our state that have educational programming and are predominately supported by community supporters and local foundations rather than Federal and State monies.

Julie Lowe
Executive Director , and

TIS Board:

Peter Woicke, Chair
Julia McCalmon, Vice Chair
Larry Neviaser, Treasurer
Ross Benincasa, Secretary
Debra Kamsheh, Director
Ann Davis, Director
Sandra Hack, Director
Bill Browning, Director
Ben Jensen, Director

Charlene DeShields, Director
Michele Dappert, Director
Ingrid Diaz-Lopez, Director
Rudy Reyes-Delcid