



Help for Today... Hope for Tomorrow

My name is Aimee Izer, the Administrator of The Hope Center at the Hagerstown Rescue Mission. I am writing in opposition to HB 0577. The Hope Center has been providing shelter and resources to the homeless community since 1955. The Hope Center is a multi-faceted faith-based organization providing emergency shelter services to men 365 days a year. We also offer a residential life recovery program based on Biblical truth in Christian fundamentals. We provide three meals daily to anyone who wants to utilize this resource, regardless of age, sex, gender, or religion. During extreme weather conditions we provide a warming/cooling center. The Hope Center has never once closed our doors to the community in the last 69 years. We have never taken taxpayer funding for the operation of this ministry.

As of December 2023, The Hope Center provided 17,899 bed nights, served 53,685 meals, provided 660 different families with food assistance, and gave \$27,103 in clothing to 2398 people through our voucher system.

House Bill 0577 goes directly against our religious standards, religious conduct, and religious freedoms. House Bill 0577 gives the state carte blanche say over our operational standards including at minimum standards for: "incorporation and governance, number and duties of paid staff, procedures for vetting volunteers", and so on. The Hope Center cannot and will not allow the state to have governance over our religious freedoms and ministry and continue to operate as such.

If House Bill 0577 would progress it directly goes against our religious freedoms and autonomy protected under the 1st Amendment. Passage of House Bill 0577 will result in loss of services provided by The Hope Center. Creating a detrimental impact on the Homeless population and surrounding community.

The delegation of authority to a regulation agency without sufficient constitutional protections in place is in and of itself unconstitutional.

The regulation goes beyond solving the compelling government interest and does not only regulate what is necessary to resolve the government interest. The bill goes beyond and infringes on the first amendment rights of the faith based homeless shelters.

I would ask for an amendment to this bill taking out section 6-1204 Letter A or making for a religious exemption to this part of the bill. We are good with letter B as we all are concerned with the health and safety of our buildings.

Aimee Izer
Administrator
The Hope Center at the Hagerstown Rescue Mission



*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

