



Wes Moore | Governor

Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor

Carmel Roques | Secretary

Date: February 16, 2024

Bill Number: **HB577**

Bill Title: Department of Housing and Community Development - Homeless Shelter Licensing Program - Establishment

Committee: House Environment and Transportation

MDOA Position: FAVORABLE

The Department of Aging (MDOA) thanks the Chair and Committee members for the opportunity to submit this letter of support for House Bill (HB) 577 - Department of Housing and Community Development - Homeless Shelter Licensing Program - Establishment.

House Bill 577 would establish a homeless shelter licensing program in the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, requiring that all shelters be relicensed every two years and lays out key building and operating standards for the benefit of shelter residents. This wisely aims to bring state oversight and consistent quality of care to all homeless shelter operations in Maryland.

The Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) supports this increased state oversight because the older adult population in Maryland is growing exponentially and with that growth is increased older adult homelessness. According to DHCD's FY2023 data, collected by local continuums of care, Maryland's homeless shelters regularly serve older adults. Of the over 32,000 Marylanders that experienced homelessness in FY2023, about a quarter of those people were older adults. In many counties, older adults experiencing homelessness are the fastest growing age cohort.¹ Thus, when DHCD and our area agencies on aging hear from people about situations where they have been denied entry into shelters based on their membership in a protected class, denied

¹ See, e.g., Howard County PATH Home, 2020-2025 Plan to End Homelessness, p. 22, available at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.howardcountymd.gov/community-partnerships/resource/path-home>



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services unfairly or in violation of federal law, or experience trauma or mistreatment while staying in shelters - they are undoubtedly hearing from older adults experiencing this mistreatment too. Older adults regularly have physical limitations and special medical care issues and will benefit from a uniform standard of service that is regulated, monitored and enforced.

Pursuant to a recent Executive Order, in January 2024, MDOA launched the Longevity-Ready Maryland Initiative,² which will build upon existing efforts across state agencies, private and philanthropic sectors and other stakeholders to tackle real-life challenges throughout the lifespan, taking a whole-of-life and whole-of-government approach. Key goals of Longevity-Ready Maryland are for all Marylanders to lead lives that are healthy, financially secure, socially connected, purposeful - with improved access to affordable housing, healthcare, and retirement needs. For Maryland to be longevity-ready, we need a high-functioning homeless shelter network overseen by a statewide agency, and through a uniform approach, such as is proposed by HB 577.

For these reasons, the Department of Aging respectfully urges a favorable report for HB 577. If you have any questions, please contact Andrea Nunez, Legislative Director, at andrea.nunez@maryland.gov or (443) 414-8183.

Sincerely,

Carmel Roques
Secretary
Maryland Department of Aging

² See Maryland Department of Aging: Longevity-Ready Maryland Initiative *available at*: <https://aging.maryland.gov/Pages/LRM.aspx>



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