



BILL NO: House Bill 577
TITLE: Department of Housing and Community Development – Homeless Shelter Licensing Program – Establishment
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation
HEARING DATE: February 16, 2024
POSITION: **OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the House Environment and Transportation Committee to issue an unfavorable report unless amended on HB 577.**

House Bill 577 establishes a Homeless Shelter Licensing Program within the Department of Housing and Community Development. This bill as drafted would include domestic violence shelters. The MNADV is comprised of member programs which provide services in all 24 of Maryland’s jurisdictions, and many of these longstanding programs operate domestic violence shelters. These shelters already adhere to county requirements per fire marshal and other inspectors and receive technical assistance and training from MNADV. They are well established programs that exist pursuant to [MD Code, Family Law, § 4-515](#) and [Md. Code Regs. 01.04.01.05](#). This program duplicates current processes already in place for domestic violence shelters.

Additionally, staff at Maryland’s domestic violence shelters are already tasked with an extremely difficult job. Not only are they serving people who are homeless, they are working with domestic and intimate partner violence survivors who are experiencing various levels of trauma. The numbers and needs of these survivors have only increased in the past four years since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Yet, the shelters have remained open, avoided outbreaks, and continued to provide a high quality of service to victims of domestic and intimate partner violence while maintaining their confidential location. Adding additional licensing regulations to an already heavily taxed workforce would only serve to create a greater amount of paperwork and time spent away from the actual job of working with these victims and, often, their children.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, domestic violence shelters – unlike other traditional homeless shelters – are confidential locations. Maintaining the safety of these victims is the highest priority for shelter staff. Additional inspections pose risks to the safety, security, and confidentiality of the shelters and their residents. The Violence Against Women Act provides for strict confidentiality for victims of domestic violence. The MNADV and its member programs take this requirement very seriously.

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MNADV would respectfully request an amendment to the bill that would exclude domestic violence shelters operated by a comprehensive program pursuant to [MD Code, Family Law, § 4-515](#) and [Md. Code Regs. 01.04.01.05](#). Absent such an amendment we are compelled to oppose this bill due to the safety concerns for victims and the unduly burdensome and duplicative requirements the licensing process would entail.

For the above stated reasons, the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges **an unfavorable report unless amended.**