



TALBOT INTERFAITH SHELTER

More Than a Shelter...

SHELTER 🏠 STABILITY 🏠 SUPPORT 🏠 SUCCESS

February 14, 2024

Testimony for HB0577

I am writing to express my concerns regarding a bill currently under consideration, which may have significant implications for homeless shelters like Talbot Interfaith Shelter (TIS) in Maryland.

As the Director of Development and Marketing at TIS, I am deeply committed to our mission of ending homelessness on Maryland's Mid-Shore by providing Shelter, Stability, Support, and a path to Success for individuals and families in need. Our organization operates with a focus on inclusivity and respect for individuality, collaborating with diverse religious faith groups and community organizations to ensure access to safe, secure housing and resources for sustainable self-sufficiency for all, regardless of background or circumstance.

TIS operates two facilities in Easton, MD - Easton's Promise, serving families, and Evelyn's Place, serving singles. These facilities provide not only shelter but also a supportive environment where guests can rebuild their lives through our S4 Program, which offers comprehensive life skills education and transitional housing opportunities. Our program has proven successful in helping individuals overcome the traumas of homelessness and become contributing members of our community.

While we are not opposed to becoming licensed with the State and are open to bi-annual inspections, we have concerns about the potential implications of the bill on our organization's ability to serve our guests effectively. Specifically, we are concerned that mandated policies that restrict our ability to screen applicants for violent crimes, drug distribution, and use may compromise the safety and integrity of our program. Our community relies on our commitment to maintaining alcohol and drug-free facilities and conducting background checks as part of our promise to provide a supportive and secure environment for our guests.

Furthermore, I worry that these mandated changes could undermine our relationships with our community supporters and local foundations, who have generously contributed to our annual operating budget of \$1.4 million. Without their support, we may face financial instability that could ultimately jeopardize our ability to continue providing essential services to those in need.

I urge you to carefully consider the potential consequences of this bill on shelters like ours that rely heavily on community support and have developed successful educational programming tailored to the needs of our guests. Any changes should be made with a thorough understanding of the unique challenges and requirements of organizations like ours to ensure that we can continue our vital work without undue disruption.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further and provide additional insights from our perspective as a frontline provider of homeless services in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Laura Richeson

Director of Development & Marketing

109 Goldsborough Street

Easton, MD 21601

(443) 786-6962

lauraricheson@talbotinterfaithshelter.org