

**HB0577 – Department of Housing and Community Development – Homeless Shelter
Licensing Program – Establishment**

Hearing before the Environment & Transportation Committee on

February 16, 2024

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Working in the field of services for people experiencing homelessness, I am writing to express support for HB0577 (cross-filed with SB1107) with proposed amendments. While the intentions of the bill are commendable, I have serious concerns regarding the current language of the bill, particularly in terms of oversight, administration, and shelter regulations. This bill adds an unnecessary burden to existing limited resources, potentially creating more barriers to shelter for our most vulnerable neighbors. The funding sources and local county/city codes for privately funded and government-funded shelters require a majority of what the legislation proposes. This bill creates duplicative work of other programs and local ordinances. I suggest:

- Clarification of Language with stakeholder input: Ensure the language used in the bill is clear and precise to avoid misinterpretation. Ambiguities in the current text may lead to unintended consequences, and clarification will help mitigate any potential issues.
- Create an exception to the need for State licensing for shelter programs that are continually monitored by federal or local authorities. Shelter & Transitional programs have a plethora of checklists and regulations from government agencies and authorities, including different departments within the same government agency.
- Establish a robust oversight mechanism to monitor the implementation of the bill. Oversight should ensure that the regulations do not inadvertently create additional barriers to shelter. Regulations may hinder community involvement limiting resources to help our unsheltered individuals and families.
- Stakeholder Involvement: Include provisions for meaningful input from relevant stakeholders, such as housing advocates, shelters, community organizations, and people with lived experience. Their insights can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the potential impact of the bill on shelter accessibility and inform necessary adjustments.
- Flexibility in Regulations: Introduce flexibility in the regulations to accommodate variations in local contexts. Different communities may face unique challenges, and a one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable. Allowing for adaptability will ensure that the bill can be effectively implemented across diverse regions.
- Support the regulations and set aside funding sources. Programs will need additional funding, resources, and staffing to meet these regulations and training requirements.

I am committed to supporting legislation that promotes access to shelter without inadvertently creating additional barriers for those in need. Thank you for considering these proposed amendments. I look forward to further discussion and collaboration to ensure the successful passage of a bill that truly serves its intended purpose.

Sincerely,

Heather Cassity

Chair, Coalition to End Homelessness in Anne Arundel County and Annapolis City

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