

The cost of living is significantly impacting the ability for all people to afford housing. Maryland's average rent is \$1,729 for a one-bedroom apartment. To only spend 30% of your monthly income on rent in Maryland, you'd need to make \$5,763 per month. As evictions and homelessness increase shelters are implementing further barriers to success. Without licensing and regulations, shelters are permitted to follow their own ideologies regarding who deserves access to shelter. They are able to discriminate against protected classes and claim their religion as an excuse.

I personally work with the unhoused population in Salisbury, Maryland.

I would like to tell you about whom I serve and why they have been denied shelter.

- A family with three street homeless children was denied shelter because the mother and father were unmarried. The shelter stated that this went against their religious beliefs. This family chose to go to the courthouse and get married so that they would not be homeless.
- A trans woman was denied shelter for being "unsafe for children" because of her gender identity despite having no record of violence. She was given shelter at a separate organization where she was housed with men and her paperwork was circled with both man and woman on it. She left and chose to be street homeless due to harassment.
- Two unhoused individuals died last month due to the shelter not allowing anyone who has substance abuse disorder to stay.
- A man who spoke French-creole was told that he could not stay in a shelter because his language barrier was a safety concern.
- A man was denied shelter at both of our local shelters because his wheelchair was labeled a "liability"

What do we do as organizations that provide support for the vulnerable when the institutions provided turn away anyone they don't agree with or who they see as inconvenient?