

The public library is a central pillar of the community and serves as one of the only truly public spaces remaining in our communities. As such, we work with members of the community from all experiences and backgrounds. One of the key demographics we serve are our unhoused patrons. As such, we see directly into the difficulties faced by the unhoused in our community. There is limited access to shelters for anyone, and the ones we do have access to build up a multitude of barriers for access. Unhoused people who are seeking shelter in Wicomico County are regularly turned away for missing deadlines for intake, for suffering from substance use disorders, for their sexual orientation, for their gender identity, for their religious affiliation, and much more. This population is regularly turned away from local shelters, even in instances of extreme weather conditions that are dangerous for those without shelter. Their behaviors are deemed irrelevant, while these characteristics, which are largely based in discriminatory personal beliefs, are the focus. A lack of appropriate resources has been proven to be deadly to our community. This bill will create a foundation for improving the safety and protection of a vulnerable population in our community.

Access to shelter should not be determined based on morality and personal values. All people deserve equitable access to their basic rights, which includes shelter.