

Liz Hersh, Principal of Policy and Advocacy
Community Solutions
Re. Testimony in Support of HB 0734

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Liz Hersh, and I serve as the Principal of Policy and Advocacy for [Community Solutions](http://www.community.solutions), a national organization committed to ending homelessness. Through our work with over 100 communities across the nation, including those within Maryland, specifically in Montgomery County and Baltimore, we have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of well-coordinated systems that leverage real-time, [by-name data](#) to make strategic housing investments. This approach, which emphasizes coordination across disciplines, has consistently proven effective in reducing the number of individuals experiencing homelessness.

HB 0734 represents a critical step forward for Maryland. By repealing the authority of municipalities to prohibit vagrancy, this legislation aligns with what we have learned: criminalization is not the answer to homelessness. Instead, we must focus on creating inclusive, supportive systems that address the underlying causes of homelessness with compassion and understanding.

The bill's removal of vagrancy from the activities municipalities can prohibit is a clear indication of Maryland's commitment to shifting away from punitive measures and towards a more supportive, inclusive approach to ending homelessness. This change encourages local governments to seek solutions that address the root causes of homelessness, rather than penalizing those affected by it. We know that these alternative approaches work. In 2015, using the approaches outlined here and working with our organization, Montgomery County reached [functional zero](#) for veteran homelessness. Since then, the communities involved have worked to sustain that outcome while reducing both chronic and family homelessness on its journey to ending homelessness for all. reached zero levels of veterans homelessness.

Using quality, real-time data to inform strategic housing investments and coordination across various sectors significantly reduces homelessness. This approach not only

benefits those directly experiencing homelessness but also strengthens the entire community by fostering a more inclusive, supportive environment for all residents.

In conclusion, we strongly support HB 0734 and urge its passage. This legislation is a vital step toward more humane, effective solutions to homelessness in Maryland. It aligns with proven strategies that emphasize support and coordination over criminalization. By adopting this bill, Maryland can lead the way in demonstrating that compassionate, data-informed approaches are the most effective means to address and reduce homelessness.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

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