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**TESTIMONY ON SB234 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Housing and Community Development – Homeless Shelter Certification Program – Establishment**

**TO:** Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**FROM:** Ebony Battle

My name is Ebony Battle. I am a resident of District 2. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 234, which would establish the Housing Shelter Certification Program. I am a community activist, a future social worker, and someone who once experienced housing insecurity.

**I have witnessed firsthand how establishing a licensure program can improve the lives of our vulnerable, unhoused neighbors.** In the absence of shelter certification, many individuals who face housing insecurity are subject to harmful and discriminatory practices that don't adhere to the Civil Rights Act. Not only are daily shelter operations inhumane, but the service providers and employees aren't sufficiently trained to interact with individuals in crisis scenarios. Last year, I worked as a case manager for those facing housing insecurity. I dealt with many despairing circumstances, but it was nothing compared to what one of my clients had to face. There are many barriers to accessing a shelter bed, a few being finances, identity, and living standards at these facilities. Many clients would rather remain unhoused even in harsh weather than be subjected to further harm. Those who were able to get a bed would often discuss dehumanizing conditions such as poor food quality, discrimination, and violence. Causing their shelter stays to be short-lived. These practices only further displace our clients, sometimes making it more difficult for case managers to locate them.

**When shelter operations were tolerable, I watched my clients flourish, as housing provides security and self-regard while promoting one's health.** SB 234 would enact various safety protocols. Some include:

- Accessibility for disabled people
- Regulations around food, safety, and hygiene
- Provisions for pregnant individuals, infants, and children
- Required training for employees
- An ordinance around admittance pertaining to an individual's identity orientation.

**In recent years, Anchorage, Alaska, passed identical legislation that has increased outreach and several other homeless services.** Last August, a monthly count reported that rates of homelessness decreased by fourteen percent. The findings also revealed that more unhoused people were accessing homeless services (Goodykoontz, 2025).

**Additionally, this bill would implement accountability measures that would improve living standards.** A recent federal ruling criminalized homelessness by making it illegal to sleep

outside. If anti-squatting policy forces unhoused individuals into shelters, then it only seems equitable that shelters are safe and accessible. Passing this bill will ensure that every member of society has the opportunity to flourish. It is the duty of the state to protect all of its constituents.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB 234.**

## References

- Goodykoontz, E. (2025, January 12). *Data shows homelessness rising dramatically in Alaska, but the numbers also tell a complicated story*. Anchorage Daily News.  
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