



Help for Today... Hope for Tomorrow

January 16, 2025

Subject: SB0234/HB0093

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my opposition to SB0234 / HB0093 as it is currently written. My concern stems from the fact that a similar bill was left for a study last year to determine whether a Shelter Permit was even feasible. Despite being open and available to contribute input from our position on these matters, I was never contacted, nor was I made aware of the study's findings or conclusions.

I strongly urge the legislature to include a religious exemption amendment to this bill. As a faith-based, legally organized, and federally recognized non-profit (501(c)(3)) organization, we operate with specific religious freedoms protected by the First Amendment. The current wording of this bill threatens our ability to run our ministry in alignment with our religious beliefs, and we would be forced to consider legal action to protect those rights if this bill moves forward without such provisions.

Another key concern is the financial impact this bill would impose on both organizations like ours and the State of Maryland. Historically, non-profits—particularly religious organizations—have stepped in to alleviate burdens on the state during times of financial hardship. At The Hope Center in Hagerstown, Maryland, we have been providing services for 70 years without any financial assistance from the state or federal government. We rely solely on the generosity of individuals, churches, businesses, and independent grants. Over the last decade, we've provided 155,751 bed nights to those in need, including shelter and recovery program beds. Last year alone, we offered 18,046 bed nights.

Implementing this bill without understanding its fiscal and operational implications could have disastrous consequences. The rate of homelessness in our country has risen 18% in the last year alone, and yet, this bill may inadvertently lead to the closure of multiple shelters, placing additional strain on the state's already limited resources. I urge you to consider the study (if completed) and evaluate whether it accounted for the potential fallout from shelter closures and the increased demand for state-funded services.

I ask that you pause and avoid rushing this bill forward without thoughtful amendments. At its core, we all want what is best for our communities and the individuals we serve. I am confident we can find a collaborative solution that addresses the issues at hand while protecting the essential role of religious organizations like ours.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to discuss this further or provide additional information if needed.

Sincerely,

Aimee L. Izer

Administrator
The Hope Center
Hagerstown, Maryland



*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

