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The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony of Trans Maryland

IN SUPPORT OF

Senate Bill #234: Housing and Community Development - Homeless Shelter Certification Program - Establishment

To the Chair, Vice Chair, and esteemed members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Trans Maryland is a multi-racial, multi-gender community power building organization for Maryland's trans community. In addition to our work running the the state's largest name and gender marker change program, in which we offer peer-to-peer guidance and financial assistance to Marylanders seeking a name and gender marker change, we also regularly work with transgender and gender diverse Marylanders who are experiencing housing instability. As part of this work, innumerable transgender Marylanders have detailed to us the barriers they face when attempting to access affirming housing or emergency shelter.

Unfortunately, those barriers are quite substantial. In the overwhelming majority of the state, affirming housing for transgender Marylanders experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity simply does not exist. Of Maryland's 23 Counties, *none* offer affirming housing, while the few programs in Baltimore City routinely operate at maximum capacity.

The problem is even more acute because transgender people are significantly more likely than their cisgender peers to experience housing instability in the first place. According to the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey, a community-based survey of over 92,000 transgender people across the United States conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality, nearly one-third (30%) of respondents reported having experienced homelessness thus far during their lifetimes.¹ This is more than double the national average of 14% of individuals who had

¹ James, S.E., Herman, J.L., Durso, L.E., & Heng-Lehtinen, R. (2024). *Early Insights: A Report of the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey*. National Center for Transgender Equality, Washington, DC.
https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/2022%20USTS%20Early%20Insights%20Report_FINAL.pdf



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experienced housing insecurity and quadruple the number (7.4%) who had reported literal homelessness.² This radically heightened risk of homelessness is caused by a number of factors, including:

- Significantly higher rates of unemployment among transgender individuals. The 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey reports that 18% of respondents were unemployed at the time they took the survey, while 11% reported they had been fired, forced to resign, lost a job, or been laid off because of their gender identity or expression.³
- Unsupportive family, who are often the cause of housing instability in the first place. Eight percent of U.S. Transgender Survey respondents stated they had been kicked out of the house because they were transgender, while 11% reported growing up in a household with a family member who was violent towards them because they were transgender.⁴ Because of this, transgender people often lack the option of moving in with family when times get tough.
- Housing discrimination because of their transgender identity. One in five transgender people reported being denied an apartment or home because of their gender expression, while one in ten reported actually being evicted on the basis of being transgender.⁵

And yet despite this heightened need for shelter, disturbing gaps remain in access for transgender people versus our cisgender peers, as detailed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in *Equal Access for Transgender People: Supporting Inclusive Housing and Shelters*, published in April 2021. Particularly concerning is HUD's recognition that "[n]early 30% of homeless transgender individuals report being turned away from a shelter due to their transgender status and 22% report experiencing sexual assault perpetrated by staff or other shelter residents."⁶

Unfortunately, without action by the General Assembly, this problem is likely to get worse. Over the past several years, Trans Maryland has seen a sharp rise in new Marylanders seeking our services, Marylanders who were fleeing the now 26 states that have banned at least some

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Permanent Supportive Housing: Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes Among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2018 Jul 11. Appendix C, Counting the Number of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519593/>

³ James, S.E., Herman, J.L., Durso, L.E., & Heng-Lehtinen, R. (2024). *Early Insights: A Report of the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey*. National Center for Transgender Equality, Washington, DC. https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/2022%20USTS%20Early%20Insights%20Report_FINAL.pdf

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *Equal Access for Transgender People: Supporting Inclusive Housing and Shelters*. April 2021. <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Equal-Access-for-Transgender-People-Supporting-Inclusive-Housing-and-Shelters.pdf>

⁶ *Ibid.*



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manner of gender affirming care. Most striking, we have seen many new transgender Marylanders from Florida, which has banned gender affirming care not only for youth, but also 80% of transgender adults there. With a decision by the United States Supreme Court upholding these bans likely to come this summer, Maryland is likely to welcome many new residents fleeing hostile legal regimes in other states, putting potentially more strain on Maryland's network of homeless shelters.

With transgender Marylanders under attack at a national level, this state has a moral obligation to recognize our basic human dignity and right to housing. We at Trans Maryland call on you to enact Senate Bill 234, a common sense bill that ensures those most at need for emergency housing are not the first to be denied it. It is time for the law to be crystal clear for transgender Marylanders and ensure Maryland's shelters offer a safe space for us.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 234.