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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: Samantha Gowing, Public Justice Center

My name is Samantha Gowing. I am an attorney at the Public Justice Center and a resident of District 45. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB234 for the establishment of the Housing Shelter Certification Program.

The Public Justice Center believes in everyone's right to a safe, stable place to live—whether homeowner, renter, or someone experiencing homelessness. In my role as an attorney at the Public Justice Center, I fight for Maryland renter's rights to enforce habitability standards in rental housing. I also see firsthand just how quickly life events can lead someone to losing their housing, from the sudden death of a household breadwinner to a debilitating injury that puts someone out of work. Those who have lost their housing and rely on Maryland homeless shelters for their basic needs deserve to live in habitable environments, just as every Maryland resident deserves a safe place to live.

Maryland's homeless shelters serve a highly vulnerable population. People living in shelters are experiencing times of crisis, whether fleeing domestic violence, fighting high risks of contracting illness, or working hard to ensure the basic needs of themselves and their families are met day-to-day. Given the high level of vulnerability of the people that Maryland's homeless shelters serve, it is imperative that shelters provide minimum standards of habitability and quality of care to their residents.

Maryland already requires animal shelters to meet standards for quality of care and good conditions. Places where people live and receive care should be held to basic standards of habitability and quality of care as well. I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB234.