

January 31, 2025

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland General Assembly
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Support for House Bill 93 – Housing and Community Development - Homeless Shelter Certification Program - Establishment

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 93 (HB0093), which seeks to establish a homeless shelter certification program within the Department of Housing and Community Development. This legislation mandates the development of operational and building standards for homeless shelters and sets minimum standards to protect the rights of shelter residents. Additionally, it requires shelter operators to participate in the Homeless Management Information System.

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Homelessness is a critical issue affecting many communities across Maryland, including a significant number of Latino individuals and families. According to the Maryland Interagency Council on Homelessness, minorities, particularly African Americans and Latinos, are disproportionately represented among the homeless population. Establishing a certification program ensures that all shelters adhere to consistent standards, providing safe and dignified accommodations for those in need.

By implementing standardized operational and building requirements, HB 93 will enhance the quality of services provided to homeless individuals. This includes ensuring that shelters are equipped to meet the diverse needs of their residents, such as language accessibility for non-English speakers, which is vital for Latino communities. Moreover, the participation in the Homeless Management Information System will facilitate better data collection and service coordination, leading to more effective interventions and resource allocation.

Protecting the rights of shelter residents is paramount. This bill's provision for minimum standards in this regard will help prevent discrimination and ensure equitable treatment for all individuals, regardless of their background. For Latino residents, who may face language barriers or cultural misunderstandings, these protections are essential to ensure they receive fair and respectful treatment.

We respectfully urge the members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee to issue a favorable report on HB0093. Passing this legislation will demonstrate Maryland's commitment to providing safe, equitable, and high-quality shelter services to all residents in need, thereby promoting dignity and respect for our most vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

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