



February 12, 2026

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 463 - Municipalities - Vagrancy - Repeal of Authority to Prohibit.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 463 - Municipalities - Vagrancy - Repeal of Authority to Prohibit. Vagrancy is not defined in state law but can be generally understood as the act of being unhoused without a source of income. This bill would remove the word “vagrancy” from the Local Government article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, preventing municipalities from further penalizing some of the most vulnerable populations in the state.

Over 30,000 people in Maryland experience homelessness per year¹, and around 1,500 people in Baltimore experience homelessness on a given night.² On top of being forced to navigate below-freezing temperatures without stable shelter, unhoused people are disproportionately harmed by the opioid crisis. In 2021, 65% of deaths in Maryland’s unhoused population were attributed to overdose or complications associated with drug use, 90% of which was from opioid use.³ There is clearly much work left to be done.

Arresting and penalizing unhoused people, who are already struggling to find food, shelter, and treatment, only furthers their suffering and sets them further back on the road to health, financial security, and recovery. Any arrests or fines would only create roadblocks to maintaining employment, finding housing, and seeking treatment. Penalizing homelessness is neither a way to end homelessness nor to address the opioid epidemic, and SB 463 recognizes this. Instead, Maryland can take a “housing first” approach to support its most vulnerable residents and take a leading role in the fight against opioid deaths.

State law should not create additional hurdles for some of our most vulnerable Marylanders.
BHSB urges the House Judiciary Committee to support SB 463.

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

Endnotes:

¹ Healthcare for the Homeless, *Homelessness in Maryland*. Available at: <https://www.hchmd.org/homelessness-maryland#:~:text=Each%20year%20in%20Maryland%2C%2030%2C000%2B%20people%20experience%20homelessness.,poverty%2C%20housing%20and%20health%20is%20close%20and%20direct.>

¹ Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, *2023 Baltimore City Point-In-Time Count Report*. Available at: <https://homeless.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Baltimore%20City%202023%20PIT%20Count%20Report.pdf>

¹ Maryland Interagency Council on Homelessness, *2020-2021 Report on Homelessness*. Available at: <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/HomelessServices/Documents/2021AnnualReport.pdf>