

BERNICE MIREKU-NORTH, ESQ.
Legislative District 14
Montgomery County

Ways and Means Committee

Subcommittees

Early Childhood

Local Revenues



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 222
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3539 · 301-858-3539
800-492-7122 Ext. 3539
Bernice.Mireku-North@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of House Bill 432: Municipalities - Vagrancy - Repeal of Authority to Prohibit
February 3rd, 2026

Madam Chair Bartlett, Madam Vice Chair Davis, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, it is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 432: Municipalities - Vagrancy - Repeal of Authority to Prohibit**.

This bill is a reintroduction of [House Bill 734](#) from the 2024 legislative session, which passed the House but was not brought to a vote in the Senate. This year, with a Senate cross-file, we hope this bill represents a crucial step toward cleaning up our criminal code while fulfilling our State's moral obligation to decriminalize homelessness.

Following the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865, free Black men and boys could not be put into slavery unless they committed a criminal offense. As such, vagrancy laws were widely used as a means to apprehend free Black Americans, including the [Black boys buried at Cheltenham](#). Today, Black Marylanders remain disproportionately represented among the unhoused population and therefore particularly vulnerable to the enforcement of vagrancy laws.

In June 2024, the Supreme Court's decision in *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson* left the door open for municipalities to enforce vagrancy laws that ban camping or sleeping in public spaces, even when individuals experiencing homelessness have no access to alternative shelter. We are already seeing this play out in Maryland. In August 2025, [Hagerstown](#) passed an ordinance temporarily banning outdoor life-sustaining activities and the storage of personal belongings.

By removing the one word "vagrancy" as a tool to criminalize people experiencing homelessness, this bill sends a clear statewide signal that Maryland is focused on housing our unhoused neighbors and providing supportive services rather than punishing them for their circumstances.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on House Bill 432.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernice Mireku-North".
The Honorable Bernice Mireku-North, Esq.
Delegate. Maryland Legislative District 14
Maryland House of Delegates