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MAYOR

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HB 206

January 28, 2020

TO: Members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 206 – Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 206. HB 206 authorizes an unaccompanied minor in need of shelter to consent to shelter and supportive services if the service provider believes the minor understands the risks, benefits, and limits of services and can communicate informed consent, and requires a service provider to contact a parent, guardian, or adult relative of an unaccompanied minor within 72 hours or sooner, among other provisions.

Baltimore City is home to 150,000 amazing and resilient youth ages 6-19, yet many of them grow up experiencing poverty, trauma, and structural racism leading to poor health and well-being.¹ Special attention must be paid to young people in the City who may be escaping abusive relationships, have been rejected by family members for their gender identity or sexual orientation, or have recently left the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, as they are at particular risk for experiencing homelessness.²

According to the 2018 Reach out, Engage, Assist, & Count to end Homelessness Maryland (REACH MD) youth count, a regular survey of homeless youth and service providers in Maryland, there are 1,500 unaccompanied homeless youth in Baltimore City—a nearly 20 percent increase from the 2015 Youth REACH MD count. These children are largely disconnected from homeless service providers who have traditionally focused on serving homeless adults or families with young children. Living on their own and without stable housing,

¹ Hale, DR, Bevilacqua, L, Viner, RM. Adolescent Health and Adult Education and Employment: A Systematic Review. *Pediatrics* (2015) 136 (1): 128-140.

² Shannahan, Harburger, Unick, Greeno, & Shaw, 2016.

they are at risk for a broad range of negative outcomes, including dropping out of school, unplanned pregnancy, addiction, physical abuse, mental health disorders, unemployment, and chronic adult homelessness. According to SchoolHouse Connection, a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness, without services, homeless youth often fall victim to serious criminal activity; notably:

- 70% of homeless youth report experiencing some form of violence, 32% of which includes sexual assault.³
- 40% of homeless youth are victims of sex trafficking at least once in a single year.⁴

Unfortunately, surveys of homeless youth indicate that they are unable or unwilling to seek services due to the need for parental consent and/or the involvement of the child welfare system. Eliminating this barrier through HB 206 would allow homeless service providers the ability to intervene before homeless youth become victims of dangerous predators.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 206.

³ Hale, DR, Bevilacqua, L, Viner, RM. Adolescent Health and Adult Education and Employment: A Systematic Review. *Pediatrics* (2015) 136 (1): 128-140.

⁴ https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/state-laws-to-support-youth-experiencing-homelessness/#_edn2.