



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

ROCKVILLE: 240-777-6550

ANNAPOLIS: 240-777-8270

SB 207

DATE: February 5, 2020

SPONSOR: Senator Washington, et al.

ASSIGNED TO: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

CONTACT PERSON: Leslie Frey (leslie.frey@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT (Department of Health and Human Services)

Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

Senate Bill 207 would allow an unaccompanied minor in need of shelter and supportive services to receive those services from a public or private nonprofit. The bill requires written consent from the unaccompanied minor in order to receive services, and that the service provider contact an adult within 72 hours of providing services to the unaccompanied minor. Additionally, the bill would require that the Department of Housing and Community Development establish and maintain a registry of all service providers that provide shelter and supportive services to unaccompanied minors.

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services respectfully requests two amendments to the bill, which we believe will enable service providers to better serve minors and will strengthen the relationships between minors and providers. The first amendment is to remove the requirement that the provider must contact an adult with a relationship to the minor within 72 hours of providing shelter rather than simply as soon as is possible, and the second amendment is to remove the prohibition on providers providing shelter if they become aware that the minor has given false information on the consent form.

While it is critical to provide shelter to anyone in need, part of providing shelter is recognizing that some form of trauma brought the person to this situation. This is particularly difficult with youth who may have little-to-no faith in the system that is supposed to protect them. Denying an unaccompanied youth shelter because they may have lied about their age, or status with their guardian, and with the knowledge that an adult will be contacted within 72 hours, will only continue to negate that faith. Shelter should be provided first, with questions asked later as the provider develops a relationship and builds trust and faith with the minor.

It is also important to note that while no jurisdiction will deny the need for youth shelters, many do not currently have the infrastructure in place to provide appropriate and safe shelter for unaccompanied youth. Placing them in a family shelter or adult shelter may only serve to lengthen their path out of homelessness. Companion resources must be identified to support jurisdictions in developing this capacity.

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services requests that these two amendments be considered when the bill is given a favorable report.