

# CALVERT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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STATE OF MARYLAND

## EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

### *Senate Bill 207*

*Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter - Consent to Shelter and Supportive Services*

**Letter of Support Provided by Laurence Polsky, MD, MPH, FACOG**

*Position: Support – February 5, 2020*

Mr. Chairman and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, the Calvert County Health Department strongly supports SB 207.

Our local health department manages and staffs the only domestic violence shelter in Calvert County. Those who we serve arrive at our shelter in a state of physical danger and extreme emotional stress. Because the first incidence of intimate partner violence experienced by many individuals occurs before age 18, there are times when minors present for safe harbor. The lack of legal clarity regarding the ability of minors to independently consent to shelter services leaves our staff in limbo.

Underage victims of intimate partner violence represent a particularly vulnerable population who will substantially benefit from the protections afforded by SB 207. These individuals are disproportionately likely to grow up in a household plagued with physical and/or sexual abuse, and, therefore, are more likely to flee their parents/guardians prior to age 18. Although the person who perpetrates the acts of intimate partner violence necessitating admission to a domestic violence shelter may reside outside of their home, due to earlier abuse, the victims are often homeless and estranged from those who can legally consent to services available at shelters.

SB 207 will provide clear permission for domestic violence shelter staff around Maryland to provide critical services to homeless, underage victims of intimate partner violence. Access to domestic violence shelters provide physical safety, the opportunity to receive services to promote emotional healing, and steps toward a more independent life.

The Calvert County Health Department appreciates the efforts of the Senators who have contributed to this important legislation.

If you have questions, please contact Laurence Polsky, MD, MPH, FACOG at the Calvert County Health Department, at [laurence.polsky@maryland.gov](mailto:laurence.polsky@maryland.gov) or 410 535-5400 x306.