



SB 207 Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

*Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 5, 2020*

Submitted by Margo Quinlan and Stacey Jefferson, Co-Chairs

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Marylanders Against Poverty

Stacey Jefferson, Chair
P: 410-637-1900 ext 8578
C: 443-813-9231
E: stacey.jefferson@bhsbaltimore.org

Margo Quinlan, Co-Chair
C: 410-236-5488
E: mquinlan@familyleague.org

The Maryland Alliance against Poverty (MAP) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 207, which establishes that unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness have legal capacity to consent to emergency shelter and supportive services.

Unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness in Maryland lack access to emergency shelter and housing resources, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and other harms. Public school systems across the state identify thousands of students experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian each year, yet shelter options for unaccompanied minors are extremely limited. Only three Maryland jurisdictions have shelters for minors – Baltimore City, Prince George’s County, and Charles County – all of which are funded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. These existing programs have extremely limited bed space. As a result the majority of unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness lack access to immediately accessible safe spaces. This puts them at risk of trafficking and other abuse, school dropout, poor mental and physical health outcomes, and other harms.

SB 207 will establish that unaccompanied minors have legal capacity to consent to shelter admission and services, and accordingly will result in the creation of additional resources for unaccompanied minors. Maryland law is silent as to whether community-based sheltering programs may lawfully serve unaccompanied minors. As noted above, a few emergency shelters for minors have operated effectively in Maryland for years. However, other organizations typically decline to serve unaccompanied minors due to concerns about legal liability. SB 207 came about because such organizations requested clarity in the law. These organizations have indicated that they intend to move forward with providing shelter for unaccompanied minors when the legislation is enacted.

SB 207 is consistent with federal law and practices of federally-funded shelters for minors currently operating in Maryland. SB 207 includes provisions related to parental notification, mandatory reporting of suspected abuse or neglect, and service provider liability. These provisions essentially codify current practice in Maryland and are consistent with the federal law governing youth shelters funded pursuant to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges support for SB 207.

Maryland Alliance against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.