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MAYOR

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SB 207

February 5, 2020

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 207 – Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 207.

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 wellbeing.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, they are at risk for a broad range of negative outcomes, including dropping out of school, unplanned pregnancy, addiction, physical abuse, mental

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

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:

- 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 House Bill 206 would allow homeless service providers the ability to intervene before homeless youth become victims of dangerous predators.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 207.

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