



SUPPORT

SB 207 – Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

Hearing of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, February 5, 2020

Testimony of Deborah Shore, Executive Director, Sasha Bruce Youthwork

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of SB-207, the Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services.

I am Deborah Shore, Founder and Executive Director of Sasha Bruce Youthwork, an organization which has served runaway and homeless youth since 1974. We were very pleased to work in collaboration with the Social Services Department in Prince George's County to open Promise Place, a runaway and homeless youth shelter located in Capitol Heights, Md. in 2013. Promise Place is one of the federally funded runaway and homeless youth programs in the state of Maryland.

It is my experience with homeless minor youth that leads me to ask that a Favorable Report be issued on SB 207. Affirmatively establishing that minors have legal capacity to consent to shelter is of real importance in expanding access to more young people in Maryland. As it is currently for us, young people can access Promise Place because the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act permits us to shelter them immediately and for up to 72 hours before parental or child welfare permission must occur. As Maryland is working to develop its system of care for runaway and homeless youth, this bill provides the very foundation for such a system to be effective.

We certainly know that the lack of access to shelter is a primary risk factor for young people to be sexually exploited, to endure traumatic experiences of all sorts and to have a more difficult time finding a path to stabilizing and supportive influences including family reunification. It is therefore critical to open the door wide for young people who, for a variety of reasons, are away from home and without adult protection.

This bill will make Maryland's approach to serving otherwise homeless minors consistent with the Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and assure a sensible approach is mandated to make easy access for the most vulnerable youth. Given that all of our workers are trained to be mandatory reporters it also assures that if there is a concern about what might be occurring in the home a direct referral to child welfare can be made. Having programs registered with the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development seems a reasonable requirement in our view.

For these reasons and based on our lengthy experience, I strongly urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on SB 207.

If there are any questions about this testimony, please contact Deborah Shore, Executive Director, Sasha Bruce Youthwork at dshore@sashabruce.org or 202 675-9340.