



SUPPORT

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

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Testimony of Amy Rice/St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families**

Mission: St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families strengthens and supports families on their journey toward stability. Inspired by Catholic social teaching and Gospel values, St. Ann's Center provides a nurturing community where families heal from the past, overcome barriers, and take hold of their future.

Values: St. Ann's is committed to care that is **safe, nurturing, healing, empowering, and strength based** and where all are served with **compassion, dignity and respect**.

St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families supports the enactment of SB 207, which establishes that unaccompanied minors who are experiencing homelessness have legal capacity to consent to admission to sheltering programs registered with the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

Since its founding by the Daughters of Charity and incorporation by an Act of Congress in 1860, St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families has provided safe shelter and supportive comprehensive services to abused and neglected children and young pregnant and parenting women from the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Accredited by the Council on Accreditation, St. Ann's is located in Prince George's County, Maryland directly on the borderline with Washington, DC. Teen pregnancy, low birth weight, infant mortality, low educational attainment, trafficking, homelessness and adverse childhood experiences are some of the issues that affect children and youth in the region. For over three decades, St. Ann's Teen Mother Baby Program has helped homeless and runaway pregnant and parenting youth become successful and self-sufficient mothers. St. Ann's received a five-year grant from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in May, 2013 to conduct the Young Mothers Program/Maternity Group Home/Runaway and Homeless Youth Transitional Living Program (RHYP/TLP) in concert with St. Ann's Teen Mother Baby Program. During the five-year grant, all youth participants achieved higher levels of self-sufficiency; all families received pre- and postnatal care, well-baby checkups, immunizations, medical and dental care; 25 of the 29 youth participants were successfully discharged to long-term, safe and stable living situations.

St. Ann's was again awarded the ACF/RHY grant in the fall of 2019 and continues to work with Unaccompanied Runaway and Homeless Youth who are pregnant and parenting.

As described above, St. Ann's has an extensive history serving pregnant and parenting youth and adults. St. Ann's follows the regulations established Federally for Runaway and Homeless Youth grantees. SB207 supports similar regulations and allows successful programs to continue to serve this critical population in Maryland. SB207 allows agencies to work with families that are outside the scope of Child Welfare, and prevent youth from entering the Foster Care system unnecessarily. Unaccompanied homeless minors are at greater risk for exploitation, school-drop out, unsafe living conditions and much more. The risks are even higher for pregnant and parenting youth.

SB 207 will ensure that unaccompanied homeless minors in Maryland have increased access to safe shelter, which will prevent human trafficking and other exploitation and will enable shelter providers to connect minors to child welfare services when eligible. It also allows for shelters to connect unaccompanied homeless youth to necessary services and entitlements as needed, helping them on the road to self-sufficiency.

Submitted By:
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St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families
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St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families strongly urges the committee to issue a Favorable Report on SB207. Please contact **Amy Rice** (arice@stanns.org) with any questions.