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TO: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Members, Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
The Honorable Mary Washington

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
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DATE: February 05, 2020

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

On behalf of the Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP), and the Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers (MACHC), we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 207.

Senate Bill 207 reflects the recommendations of a Workgroup that was established as a result of similar legislation introduced in 2019. The above referenced organizations supported the 2019 legislation but also acknowledged that it raised a number of questions that warranted further evaluation. The workgroup that was formed was required to study the unique needs of unaccompanied homeless minors, identify the public and private sector programs and resources available to meet those needs, identify barriers unaccompanied homeless minors face in accessing safe shelter, and compile information on and study shelter practices in other states. Senate Bill 207 addresses the recommendations reflected in the Workgroup’s final report and also includes a number of provisions to ensure shelters are able to protect the health and safety of the minors they serve.

Data shows that children’s health and housing security are closely intertwined, and children without homes are more likely to suffer from chronic disease, hunger, and malnutrition. Without access to shelter, unaccompanied homeless minors are vulnerable to human trafficking and other harm. Shelters designed to serve unaccompanied homeless minors help connect these minor youth to the child welfare system and, when a minor is ineligible for child welfare services, provide a vital alternative to the streets or other unsafe living situations. Therefore, the proposed legislation especially impacts runaway and disconnected minors from families who do not meet the definition of abuse or neglect for Child Protective Services under DHS and do not receive any other type of housing supports by allowing them to consent to shelter services. In addition, a number of studies demonstrate that unaccompanied homeless youth tend to face poor economic and social circumstances as they enter adulthood, including low levels of employment and earnings. Clearly, there is an unmet need for more shelters, other housing programs, and supportive services.

As such, MedChi, MDAAP, and MACHC urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 207.

For more information call:

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