

Testimony on House Bill 746, The Mobile Laundry for the Homeless Pilot Program

Submitted by

Stefanie A. Rupertus, LCPC, Montgomery County for the Homeless

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My name is Stefanie Rupertus, and I am a Senior Programs Officer with the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH), the largest nonprofit exclusively dedicated to ending homelessness in our community. I am entering testimony to advocate for establishing the Mobile Laundry for the Homeless Pilot Program and to commend and thank Delegates Qi, Acevero, Crutchfield, Fraser-Hidalgo, Kelly, R. Lewis, Lopez, Palakovich Carr, and Smith for introducing The Mobile Laundry for the Homeless Pilot Program Bill which is a much needed service that would allow street homeless individuals the basic human need for clothing that is hygienic and presentable.

As part of my duties with MCCH, I oversee Montgomery County's men's emergency homeless shelter. I often notice when men arrive at the shelter, the clothing they are wearing as well as clothing they bring to the shelter are not clean. One of their first requests is often to wash their belongings. Although our shelter numbers have increased dramatically (46% since July 1st) due to the COVID Pandemic, there remain many individuals still living unsheltered. And once the Pandemic subsides, the homeless numbers will likely swell, and these individuals will again be without the means to have clean clothing.

Those men that reside at the shelter bring stories of being street homeless and trying to apply for work to enhance their chances of avoiding long-term homelessness. They report having to arrive for an interview in clothing that is soiled because they have no resources available to them. In a survey of what is important to our shelter clients, the top three answers are Food, Sleep, and Staying Clean. All of these are such basic human needs. Once these clients are able to have laundered clothing, they feel much more confident starting that first step to end their homelessness – searching for and applying for employment. And, even during this difficult year, quite a few have been successful in obtaining income and moving on to housing. It is amazing what clean clothes do for those wearing them and for how others view them.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony.