



**MARYLAND
LEGAL AID**

Advancing
**Human Rights and
Justice for All**

April 6, 2023

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair of the Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 848 - Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program – Establishment

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits this testimony at the request of Senator _____. Senate Bill 848 would establish a Maryland Statewide Rental Assistance Voucher Program. This bill will help to close the affordable housing gap for low-income Marylanders who are on federal voucher waiting lists. As with the House version of the bill (HB 826), MLA supports this measure and seeks the Committee's favorable report.

However, MLA continues to urge the General Assembly to include in this Voucher Program a prioritization for foster youth aging out of the foster care system. On page 6, line 13, SB 848 enumerates a priority related to foster youth. However, this language is drafted, likely erroneously, to **exclude foster youth aging out of the system.**

The bill needs to be amended so that these young Maryland avoid homelessness and stand a better chance of attaining stable housing and employment. These youth who age out of care with no stability are forced to try to find places to sleep; some sleep on the floor or couches of this friend one night and a different person the next night. Sometimes they are in shelters, sometimes with people they do not really know, and for some they are on the streets. These foster children lack a support system. They do not have the same familial safety nets and resources as children who are not in care. Creating a preference for youth aging out of foster care will ensure stable housing which leads to success in all aspects of adulthood.

We urge the House to expressly include youth aging out of the foster care system, up to the age of 24 in the prioritization provision of the bill under section 4–2906.

Current voucher programs do not provide viable options. A Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher rental assistance dedicated to a) FUP-eligible families, and b) youth ages 18 to 24, foster children.¹ However currently there are no FUP vouchers and none on the horizon in Maryland. The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) voucher makes Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) assistance available to Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) in partnership with Public Child Welfare

¹ A FUP voucher "...applies to youth at least 18 years and not more than 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday) who left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, in accordance with a transition plan described in Section 475(5)(H) of the Social Security Act, and are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/family
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Agencies (PCWAs).² However, there is an extremely lengthy waiting list, or the waiting list is closed. In Montgomery County the FUP vouchers were never really used for children but given more to parents. There is a shortage of vouchers in Montgomery County that foster children can access.

We urge the House to expressly include youth aging out of the foster care system, up to the age of 24 in the prioritization provision of the bill under section 4–2906.

For these reasons, Maryland Legal Aid urges this committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on SB 848.

Sincerely,

Gregory Countess, Esq.
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Maryland Legal Aid
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² <https://grantsforus.io/type-of-eligible-entity/organizations/local-government-agencies/foster-youth-to-independence-fyi-competitive-2022/>

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