

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF**

**HB 538 - Land Use – Affordable Housing – Zoning Density and  
Permitting (Housing Expansion and Affordability Act of 2024)**

**House Environment and Transportation Committee  
February 20, 2024**



**Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports HB 538**, which will allow for the creation of more critically needed affordable housing. As such, HB 538 will tangibly prevent and end homelessness in Maryland.

Health Care for the Homeless, established in 1985, is Maryland’s leading nonprofit provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness. We envision a community where everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community. To bring about that future, the organization works to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.

Since 2001, Health Care for the Homeless has developed and gradually expanded programing to deliver tenancy assistance and supportive services in housing for people experiencing and at great risk of homelessness. Last Fall, we opened Sojourner Place at Oliver, a 70-unit affordable apartment building in the historic Oliver neighborhood in Baltimore City with co-developer and co-owner Episcopal Housing Corporation. We intend to develop more rental housing for people experiencing and at risk of homelessness because there is simply not enough affordable housing, particularly for people making 30% or less of Area Median Income. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition 2023 GAP Report there are more than 200,000 Maryland households making less than 30% of AMI.<sup>1</sup> There are only 30 units of affordable housing for every 100 households making 30% or less of AMI in Maryland.<sup>2</sup> The deficit in available housing is the largest for any income level.

Housing ends homelessness. HB 538 will make it easier for mission-drive organizations like ours to meet the State’s pressing need for quality, affordable housing, particularly for households with extremely low incomes. This bill includes measures that increase a developer’s opportunity to leverage cost-saving construction technology, that reduce costly administrative delays for affordable housing projects that have already been scrutinized and deemed worthy of State investment, and to reasonably increase the diversity of housing options in neighborhoods with reasonable access to amenities. These are all tools that increase economy of scale, reduce costs and support the delivery of units in a timely manner – benefiting investors, lenders, developers and prospective tenants.

Housing is health care. Studies across the country confirm what we see in Baltimore City, that when people without homes are provided a safe and stable place to live, at a price they can afford, costly ED visits and hospitalizations reduce,<sup>3</sup> encounters with the criminal justice system reduce, and positive indicators or

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nlihc.org/gap/state/md>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/maryland>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the outcomes of the Maryland Medicaid supportive housing waiver program, known as Assistance in Community Integration Services (ACIS), which showed “[s]tatistically significant decline in the average number of ED visits, avoidable ED visits, and inpatient admissions for ACIS participants in the year following enrollment in the program.” The Hilltop

stability and health increase, particularly when the housing is accompanied with voluntary access to supportive health services.

Affordable housing with supportive services is precisely what we need more of in Baltimore City and across the state. If HB 538 bill passes, our organization (and many socially conscious developers like us) will be in a position to say “yes” to more redevelopment and new construction projects that our respective communities want and need, but that we currently have to pass on. I encourage you to say “yes” to much needed housing. Say “yes” to keeping well-considered projects on schedule and on budget. And vote in favor of HB 534.

*Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland’s leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.*

*We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.*

*Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.*

*Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.*

*For more information, visit [www.hchmd.org](http://www.hchmd.org).*