

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
**SB 370 - Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community
School Families Program and Fund - Establishment**

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
January 31, 2024



Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports SB 370, which would establish an eviction prevention funds program for families with children enrolled in Maryland’s community schools. Preventing evictions is a critical piece of how we prevent and end homelessness and, as such, this bill is a top priority for Health Care for the Homeless.

We know that there is a plethora of health risks associated with the disruptive displacement caused by eviction. Following an eviction, a person’s likelihood of experiencing homelessness significantly increases. Homelessness historically creates new health problems and exacerbates existing ones. Where you or I could easily manage something like diabetes or hypertension in the year 2022, even HIV, the disruptive displacement following an eviction makes caring for these things exponentially harder and sometimes impossible.

Mortality among those experiencing homelessness has escalated over the last 5-10 years. On December 21, 2023, Health Care for the Homeless gathered for our annual Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day in which we remembered the lives of hundreds of people with the experience of homelessness who died last year. There is no amount of health care that can substitute stable housing. As stable housing impacts every aspect of a person’s life, stable housing is a critical component of every child’s education.

Health Care for the Homeless Lead Therapist Case Manager Tammy Montague, LCSW-C, shared her experience working with a family who was at risk of eviction because funding was not available. Ms. Montague shared that eviction prevention funding keeps families together and kids in school. But it devastates children in more ways than education. Ms. Montague shared the story of helping a family with a little girl prevent an eviction just before Christmas. She asked the girl, Maddie,¹ what she wanted for Christmas and Maddie asked for a Barbie dream house, an easy bake oven, and a chimney. When Tammy asked why a chimney, Maddie responded because Santa need a way to bring her gifts. All she wanted for Christmas was a home. Ms. Montague described Maddie’s Christmas request as “heart wrenching” and “devastating.”

A new report from the [Maryland Center on Economic Policy](#), Maryland Eviction Prevention Funds Alliance and Stout, *Assessment of Maryland’s Need for Eviction Prevention Funds (EPF) and the Estimated Fiscal Impact of EPF*, provided specific evidence of how devastating an eviction is on a children and families. And, particularly, how eviction prevention funding can prevent this type of devastation. The study revealed that “[f]amilies experiencing homelessness who were given rental assistance were less than half as likely as families who were not given rental assistance to have a child placed in out-of-home foster care.”² Further, the report noted that “[s]chool-aged children who experience homelessness face significant mental and

¹ Name changed for privacy and confidentiality.

² Stout, *Assessment of Maryland’s Need for Eviction Prevention Funds (EPF) and the Estimated Fiscal Impact of EPF (2023)*, page 24, available at [Maryland's Need for Eviction Prevention Funds | Maryland Center on Economic Policy \(mdeconomy.org\)](#).

physical health challenges that prevent students from focusing on their education. These challenges can result in students experiencing homelessness to become chronically absent from school. Even after just one year of chronic absenteeism, students are significantly less likely to complete high school.”³

Preventing evictions is a critical part of creating a Maryland where all families can have safe, stable, affordable housing. And eviction prevention funds categorically stop families from experiencing homelessness. Even a narrowly tailored program focused on preventing homelessness or supporting families whose children are enrolled in a community school generates exponential benefits for children, particularly Black and Brown children in poverty.

We understand that the bill sponsor, Senator Hettleman, will work with advocates, the Maryland State Dept. of Education, and the Dept. of Housing and Community Development to refine the administrative structure of the program and minimize the burden on community school coordinators. We also understand and support changing the current prioritization in the bill to better address the needs of families who are homeless or most at risk of homelessness. We support these efforts as the General Assembly works to pass this critical legislation.

The importance of the stability of housing in a child’s life cannot be understated. For the health and safety of the children and families we serve and for all Marylanders, Health Care for the Homeless urges a favorable report on SB 370.

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.

³ *Id.* at page 26.