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Joint Committee on the
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Chair, Charles, St. Mary's and Calvert
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Sponsor Written Testimony: Favorable

Senate Bill 367: Maryland Medical Assistance Program –
Supportive Housing and Health Services

January 30, 2025

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I have introduced and am pleased to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 367: Maryland Medical Assistance Program -- Supportive Housing and Health Services. This bill aims to coordinate health services and housing for those most in need in Maryland. By connecting people who are housing insecure or unhoused with health services and providing supports that coordinate their housing and health needs, Maryland can improve health outcomes, reduce disparities in health outcomes, and improve access to stable housing for Maryland residents. By using this model also known as, "Housing First," Maryland can lead the nation in addressing the urgent housing crisis and improving health equity for the most marginalized.

Supportive housing is a model that connects those who are housing insecure – or in other words, those who are lacking a permanent residence or unable to pay rent for a period of time – with wraparound services and support to obtain more permanent housing. This model coordinates their other health care needs and gets to the root of issues with housing insecurity.

This bill is needed because data from the National Alliance to End Homelessness showed that 7,144 Marylanders experienced homelessness in 2018, and that over half of these individuals were identified as being African American.¹ Research from the World Health Organization supports that health and housing are directly related in numerous ways, especially

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Homelessness is a Problem in Maryland, but We're Making Progress*, <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/MD-fact-sheet-2019.pdf> (last viewed Jan. 30, 2025).

for those who are unsheltered.² Lack of stable, quality housing can make it difficult for individuals to continue taking their prescribed medications or follow up for medical appointments or treatment plans.³ It can make it difficult to cook nutritious meals, sleep well at night, or manage mental health and stress.⁴ And, of course, people facing housing insecurity may also face physical threats to their health and lives, especially if living unhoused on the street.⁵ This bill will help bridge the gap between medical services and housing services that Maryland already provides by coordinating care and providing those most in need with the supports to secure more stable housing.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), several states, including Maryland are already moving toward using the supportive housing model to improve outcomes for their residents and state.⁶ NCSL noted that supportive housing helped to reduce emergency department visits by 14.3% and reduced spending by 25.2%.⁷ Several counties in Maryland already have a supportive housing Medicaid waiver, so this bill would allow a state-wide implementation of this waiver.⁸

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to moving toward health equity together through this statewide supportive housing bill.

Sincerely,



Arthur Ellis

² World Health Organization, Health and Housing Guidelines (Nov. 23, 2018), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550376>.

³ Antoinette B. Coe, et. al., *Medication Adherence Challenges among Patients Experiencing Homelessness in a Behavioral Health Clinic*, NIH National Library of Medicine p. 2-3 (Dec. 6, 2012), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3733792/#:~:text=Several%20barriers%20to%20medication%20adherence,to%20pick%20up%20their%20medications>.

⁴ *Id.* at p. 2-5. See also, Yong Liu, et. al., *Relationships Between Housing and Food Insecurity, Frequent Mental Distress, and Insufficient Sleep Among Adults in 12 US States, 2009*, NIH National Library of Medicine (Mar. 13, 2014), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24625361/#:~:text=The%20prevalence%20of%20frequent%20insufficient,among%20those%20who%20did%20not>.

⁵ Ann Elizabeth Montgomery, et. al., *Homelessness, Unsheltered Status, and Risk Factors for Mortality*, NIH National Library of Medicine (Oct. 16, 2019), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5230839/#:~:text=Studies%20show%20that%20people%20living,14%E2%80%9316>.

⁶ National Coalition of State Legislatures, *Addressing Health Outcomes Through Supportive Housing* (Feb. 13, 2023), <https://www.ncsl.org/health/addressing-health-outcomes-through-supportive-housing>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Maryland Department of Health, *Assistance in Community Integration Services Pilot*, <https://health.maryland.gov/mmcp/Pages/Assistance-in-Community-Integration-Services-Pilot.aspx> (last viewed Jan. 30, 2025) (Counties include Baltimore City, Cecil County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County).