
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 367

Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Supportive Housing and Health Services

Finance Committee

February 4, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 367, which will require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide supportive housing and health services to qualifying individuals and families currently participating in the program. In addition, it would establish certification requirements for professionals providing these services as well as an advisory board that will assist in the enactment of this bill. Supportive housing is an evidence-based intervention that holistically addresses the needs of those currently experiencing homelessness, keeps children out of the foster care system, and addresses a major public health issue.

Marylanders experiencing homelessness need supportive housing and health services. Many people suffering from major health issues struggle to work, and current social safety net programs only go so far in supporting them through their illness. The cost of healthcare, combined with lack of income, creates a vicious cycle where many are too sick to work and too poor to afford the care and treatment they need.¹ As a result, many of these individuals become homeless, ending up in shelters or on the street where their health is put at even more risk.¹ Similarly, individuals with disabilities are at a higher risk for homelessness, with almost a quarter of individuals experiencing homelessness having a disability.² Serious mental health and substance use issues are also common among those experiencing homelessness, with 21% of the unhoused population reporting in 2022 that they suffer from a serious mental illness and 16% reporting they have a substance use disorder.³ Supportive housing and health services would allow individuals with serious physical or mental health issues, disabilities, or substance use disorders to access the services they need in a safe setting, ultimately addressing the root cause of homelessness for many.

Supportive housing keeps children out of the foster care system by providing an opportunity for struggling families to stay together. Families saw the largest rise in homelessness in 2024 at 39%, with almost 150,000 children being without a home for at

¹ National Health Care for the Homeless Council. (2019). Homelessness and health: What's the connection? Fact sheet. <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/homelessness-and-health.pdf>

² NACCHO. (2019). Homelessness among individuals with disabilities: Influential factors and scalable solutions. <https://www.naccho.org/blog/articles/homelessness-among-individuals-with-disabilities-influential-factors-and-scalable-solutions>

³ Saldua, M. (2023). Addressing social determinants of health among individuals experiencing homelessness. SAMHSA. <https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/addressing-social-determinants-health-among-individuals-experiencing-homelessness>

least one night.⁴ Families who are experiencing homelessness are more likely to become involved with the child welfare system, and the children in these families are more likely to be removed and placed in foster care as a result of this involvement, even though lack of housing itself is typically not the reason for child welfare involvement.⁵ In addition, housing instability frequently impedes reunification for families whose children have been removed.⁵ Because this bill would provide supportive housing to both qualifying individuals and families, it would also cut down on child welfare involvement for these eligible families, keeping children experiencing homelessness out of the foster system.

Homelessness is a public health problem, and supportive housing and health services serve as the solution. Homelessness alone is associated with higher mortality rates.⁶ According to The Maryland Interagency Council on Homelessness's most recent Report on Homelessness, published in 2021, the death rate among the state's homeless population is three times as high as that of the housed population, and individuals experiencing homelessness have an average life expectancy that is 30 years lower than average Marylanders.⁷ These figures do not even begin to take into consideration the complex health issues faced by those experiencing homelessness. Ultimately, ameliorating housing instability in Maryland will advance the state's overall public health.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 367.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2024). The 2024 annual homelessness assessment report to Congress. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

⁵ Casey Family Programs. 2019. What do we know about the impact of homelessness and housing instability on child welfare-involved families? <https://www.casey.org/impact-homelessness-child-welfare/>

⁶ HUD Office of Policy Development and Research. (2023). Homelessness through a public health lens. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-featd-article-040423.html>

⁷ The Maryland Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2021). 2020/2021 Report on homelessness. <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/HomelessServices/Documents/2021AnnualReport.pdf>