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## HB1164 – Counties and Municipalities – Homelessness – Local Laws

### (Right to Rest Act)

Hearing in the Judiciary Committee, March 11, 2025

#### **Position: Favorable**

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Community Legal Services supports HB1164, which prohibits local jurisdictions from enacting or enforcing laws that criminalize sleeping or sitting in public spaces, sleeping in a legally parked vehicle, and other basic acts of human survival. **Laws that would be prohibited by the Right to Rest Act disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness and contribute directly to the perpetuation of poverty and homelessness.**

Community Legal Services (CLS) is dedicated to promoting equal access to justice for underrepresented individuals and families in Maryland. We provide free, high-quality legal services to those who would otherwise lack access to legal help or representation in court. Our services encompass many areas of law, including housing, employment, and family law matters.

Through our advocacy, we have observed that **even brief periods of homelessness can have devastating consequences for our clients' future prospects, affecting their ability to secure housing, obtain employment, and maintain relationships with their children.** When arrest and resulting criminal records are piled onto the experience of being or having been homeless, the follow on effects of homelessness are multiplied, creating insurmountable barriers to success for individuals trying to get out of homelessness so they can move on to stable, productive lives.

Unhoused individuals often have no choice but to seek shelter in public or private spaces, yet they are frequently arrested and charged simply for trying to survive. These **criminal records make it even harder for them to secure housing and employment, trapping them in cycles of poverty.** By enacting the Right to Rest Act, Maryland will ensure that Marylanders are not punished for engaging in the most basic necessities of life at a time when they do not have a stable roof over their heads, and Maryland will clearly acknowledge that homelessness is not a crime.

CLS urges a favorable report on HB1164 to **ensure Maryland takes a just and humane approach to addressing homelessness - one that prioritizes developing solutions over punishment.** Please feel free to reach out to Executive Director, Jessica Quincosa and Director of Litigation and Advocacy, Lisa Sarro with any questions. ([quincosa@clspgc.org](mailto:quincosa@clspgc.org) and [sarro@clspgc.org](mailto:sarro@clspgc.org)).



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