



TALBOT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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HB0487 – Unhoused Individuals – Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense

Position: **OPPOSE (UNF)**

The Talbot County Sheriff's Office strongly opposes HB0487 (SB0484) – Unhoused Individuals – Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense as it will have negative implications to the safety and security of both unhoused and housed citizens within our community. Allowing unhoused (homeless) individuals to have free reign on any public land – sidewalks, school parking lots, shopping center parking lots, parks and even the sidewalk in front of a residence is not the solution to addressing homelessness.

Studies have shown that most unhoused individuals suffer from a significant mental health disorder or substance abuse. They need the support of wraparound services and assistance with short- and long-term housing solutions. This bill will create unsafe, unhealthy, and dangerous conditions and will tie the hands of law enforcement who are the main resource in providing aid.

Additionally, the State wishes to supersede local law and ordinances but who will be responsible if a citizen gets hit by a car because they had to walk into the street to avoid an encampment on the sidewalk or what would happen if an unregistered convicted sex offender decides to set up a shelter on a public school parking lot. As the chief law enforcement officer in my county, this law would prohibit me from removing or relocating the unhoused individual. Otherwise, the MD Attorney General may go as far as to represent the unhoused individual in civil litigation against me or anyone attempting to remove the unhoused individual.

We can look to Seattle, Portland and San Francisco to know that this model just does not work. Cities in California are currently introducing ordinances to arrest and/or fine anyone who sets up an encampment on public land. The financial impact has proved devastating to those communities. Funds should be directed at our unhoused support services and shelters. Respectfully, I ask that you vote against this bill.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sheriff Joseph Gamble
Talbot County Sheriff