

HB1164_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
03/06/2025
Richard Keith Kaplowitz Frederick,
MD 21703-7134

TESTIMONY ON HB#1164 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Counties and Municipalities - Homelessness - Local Laws (Right to Rest Act)

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB1164 - Counties and Municipalities - Homelessness - Local Laws (Right to Rest Act)

This bill recognizes that homelessness exists in our state and that the lack of housing cannot and should not be treated as a crime. Persons experiencing homelessness must be treated with dignity and respect while solutions to remediate that condition can be identified and applied.

“Homelessness is a policy choice. It is the result of generations of racist and discriminatory policies that systemically deny economic mobility, health care and housing, particularly for Black and brown neighbors.

Each year in Maryland, 30,000+ people experience homelessness. More than 10x of that many are poor.

People typically experience homelessness because they can’t afford housing, which is often perpetuated by things like poor health. The connection between poverty, housing and health is close and direct.”¹

“The criminalization of homelessness refers to measures that prohibit life-sustaining activities such as sleeping/camping, eating, sitting, and/or asking for money/resources in public spaces. These ordinances include criminal penalties for violations of these acts.”²

Some criminalization measures include:

- Carrying out sweeps: confiscating personal property including tents, bedding, papers, clothing, medications, etc.
- Making panhandling illegal.

¹ <https://www.hchmd.org/homelessness-maryland>

² <https://nationalhomeless.org/civil-rights-criminalization-of-homelessness/#:~:text=The%20criminalization%20of%20homelessness%20refers,money/resources%20in%20public%20spaces.>

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- Making it illegal for groups to share food with homeless people in public spaces.
- Enforcing a “quality of life” ordinance relating to public activity and hygiene.”

All of these measures deny humanity of persons who, for whatever reason, have become unhoused and need a hand up to return to full societal participation.

In recognition of all the deprivations that are being afflicted on homeless person this bill makes the moral statement that in Maryland “We Leave No One Behind”. It says we provide ethical and moral treatment for our homeless population. The bill makes that commitment by prohibiting a county or municipality from enacting or enforcing a local law that is designed to prevent an individual from resting or sleeping in a public space, protecting oneself from the elements in a manner that does not obstruct the use of or access to private property, or sleeping in a legally parked vehicle. If a person is in those circumstances the focus of the jurisdiction, morally and ethically, is to help to house the unhoused, never to criminalize their use of an unapproved shelter under most circumstances.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB1164.