
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1164
Counties and Municipalities - Homelessness - Local Laws (Right to Rest Act)
Judiciary Committee
March 11, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports HB 1164, which will prohibit counties and municipalities from enacting or enforcing laws that would prevent an individual from resting or sleeping in public spaces. This legislation will establish and honor an individual's right to rest.

Criminalizing the experience of homelessness does not solve the problem – it only exacerbates it while exhausting state funds in the process. Criminalization creates barriers to employment opportunities, public benefits, and stable housing, making it harder for individuals to exit homelessness. In Maryland, carceral expenditures continue to rise, with the operating budget for pretrial detentions increasing by 38.8% since FY 2025.¹ Evidence-based solutions to the problem of homelessness exist, such as Housing First and Rapid Rehousing programs, which have resulted in permanent housing success rates of up to 84%.² Investment in supportive services is far more effective than relying on punitive measures.

Homelessness is a large-scale crisis that requires a coordinated response.

County-by-county policies that criminalize people for lacking safe and stable housing result in a patchwork of inconsistent and often inhumane policies that undermine the state's efforts to address the problem of homelessness in coordinated ways. A comprehensive and humane statewide strategy would provide a baseline of protections while allowing for localized implementation to best suit individual county needs.

Maryland has the opportunity to take a step in the right direction for some of our most vulnerable community members by establishing the right to rest. This action would align with other states that protect unhoused individuals' right to move freely in public spaces without discrimination.³ By implementing HB 1164, Maryland would join a growing number of states – starting with Rhode Island, the first state to develop a "Homeless Bill of Rights", and now states like Connecticut and Delaware, which have

¹ "FY 2026 Maryland State Budget Highlights." 2025. State of Maryland.

<https://dbm.maryland.gov/budget/Documents/operbudget/2026/proposed/FY2026MarylandStateBudgetHighlights.pdf>.

² Daniel Gubits, Korrin Bishop, Lauren Dunton, Michelle Wood, Tom Albanese, Brooke Spellman, and Jill Khadduri. 2018.

"Understanding Rapid Re-Housing: Systematic Review of Rapid Re-Housing Outcomes Literature,".

³ Szyba, Randall T. 2012. "Assembly OKs legislation to create "Homeless Bill of Rights."" State of Rhode Island General Assembly News.

https://www.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease/_layouts/RIL.PressRelease.ListStructure/Forms/DisplayForm.aspx?List=c8baae31-3c10-431c-8dcd-9dbbe21ce3e9&ID=7966.



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established legal safeguards for unhoused individuals.

HB 1164 would be a step towards ensuring **resources are focused on proven, evidence-based solutions that address homelessness at its root, ultimately reducing reliance on emergency services and incarceration.** This shift would signal a priority of investment in rehabilitation, healthcare, and housing support rather than perpetuating costly and ineffective criminalization. Furthermore, **embracing this approach would reinforce Maryland's commitment to social equity and evidence-based solutions by guiding counties to address homelessness in a compassionate and sustainable way.**

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on HB 1164.

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.