



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

February 12, 2025

Committee: House Judiciary

Bill: HB 487 - Unhoused Individuals - Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense

Position: Unfavorable

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) respectfully opposes House Bill 487, which expands constitutional rights for unhoused individuals. While MML supports efforts to protect unhoused individuals' rights, this bill shifts significant responsibilities and liabilities onto local governments without addressing the root causes of housing instability.

HB 487 creates the right to occupy public spaces for life-sustaining activities like sleeping, and a right to privacy including storing personal property in those public spaces. Granting these broad rights could create enforcement challenges for local governments. Cities and towns are responsible for ensuring that public spaces remain accessible and safe for all residents. The bill could limit their ability to regulate the use of parks, sidewalks, and other public areas, making it harder to maintain public order and sanitation and address concerns from businesses, housed residents, and law enforcement. Further, allowing life-sustaining activities in public spaces could pose health and sanitation challenges, especially if there are no corresponding public infrastructure improvements, such as increased access to restrooms and waste disposal services.

This bill also poses significant financial challenges for municipalities. Municipalities often have local ordinances addressing loitering, camping, and public health. A new civil rights framework for the unhoused could conflict with this measure, requiring potentially costly revisions and legal reviews. Further, this bill grants standing to unhoused individuals to sue municipalities for violations, which could lead to increased litigation costs and liability, straining municipal budgets. Imposing new obligations on municipalities without providing funding or resources to address homelessness (such as shelter services or outreach programs) burdens local governments with additional responsibilities without adequate support.

For these reasons, the League respectfully requests that the committee provide House Bill 487 with an unfavorable report. For more information, please contact Angelica Bailey Thupari, Director of Advocacy and Public Affairs, at angelicab@mdmunicipal.org or (443) 756-0071. Thank you for your consideration.

The Maryland Municipal League uses its collective voice to advocate, empower and protect the interests of our 160 local governments members and elevates local leadership, delivers impactful solutions for our communities, and builds an inclusive culture for the 2 million Marylanders we serve.

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