

DATE: March 11, 2025

BILL NO.: House Bill 1164

TITLE: Counties and Municipalities - Homelessness - Local Laws (Right to Rest Act)

COMMITTEE: House Judiciary Committee

Letter of Support

Description of Bill:

House Bill 1164 prohibits a county or municipality from enacting or enforcing legislation that prevents individuals from resting in public, protecting oneself from the elements in an unobstructive manner to private property, or sleeping in a legally parked car.

Background and Analysis:

In 2024, the Supreme Court decided the case of the City of Grants Pass vs Johnson in favor of Grants Pass, that would allow local governments to enforce laws that prohibit sleeping/camping in public for “involuntarily” homeless persons. This decision allows homelessness to become criminalized, even when there is no shelter available, and provides no solutions to the issues inherent in creating homelessness. Additionally, it puts those who are homeless in danger of receiving a criminal record, making it more difficult to acquire housing or a job in the future.

Since 2021, Maryland has experienced a steady increase in the number of unhoused people. Further exacerbating this is Maryland’s housing shortage – which makes our current housing supply increasingly unaffordable – and increased economic hardships due to job loss and the rising cost of living. While the state works to increase the shelter and housing supply and tackle other factors that lead to homelessness, it is imperative that we address and protect the current unsheltered homeless population. Homeless individuals are citizens of the state and must be afforded the same civil and human rights – as well as dignity – given to those with housing.

By passing House Bill 1164, Marylanders facing homelessness would be protected from the criminalization of basic acts of survival, such as sleeping in public places and protecting themselves from the elements. This bill would also allow counties and municipalities to redirect resources that would have been used to prosecute unsheltered individuals to address homelessness and its contributing factors.

DHCD Position:

The Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 1164.