



HB1164 – Counties and Municipalities – Homelessness – Local Laws (Right to Rest Act)

Hearing in the Judiciary Committee, March 11, 2025

Position: Favorable

Arundel House of Hope supports HB1164. This bill will prohibit local jurisdictions from enacting or enforcing laws that criminalize sleeping or sitting in public spaces, sleeping in a legally parked vehicle, and other basic acts of human survival.

Arundel House of Hope has served individuals experiencing homelessness in Anne Arundel County since 1992. We see first-hand the lasting impact homelessness has on individuals and families. In our county and across the state, the **need for emergency shelter far outweighs the available beds year-round**. While more shelter beds are available in the winter, they still do not meet the need—and when winter programs end, the gap becomes even more severe. For example, our Winter Relief Emergency Shelter and Warming Center Program have served over **300** individuals this season. When these programs end this month, some individuals will move on to transitional housing, permanent housing, or other alternatives. However, many will have no choice but to seek shelter in public or private spaces.

Laws that criminalize homelessness perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Criminal records create barriers to employment and economic opportunities and increase the likelihood of housing application denials. Fines and mandatory court dates drain limited financial resources and create obstacles to saving for security deposits and rent. As a result, individuals experiencing homelessness are often trapped in a cycle of legal and financial hardship that makes escaping homelessness even more difficult.

Arundel House of Hope urges a favorable report on HB1164 to ensure Maryland takes a just and humane approach to addressing homelessness. We call on lawmakers to prioritize solutions, not punishment.

Sincerely,

Mario Berninzoni

Executive Director

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