



# CITY OF HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

**Sean Flaherty, Councilmember**

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Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly House of Delegates  
100 Taylor Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

RE: Testimony in Opposition to House Bill HB0487 titled “Unhouses Individuals- Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense”

Chairman Clippinger and Honorary Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you all for letting me provide written testimony, I regret that I could not be in person in Annapolis. I am writing with great concern about HB0487 which has received much attention here in Hagerstown, Maryland. I am Sean Flaherty, Councilmember of the city of Hagerstown, Maryland.

I stand with many other municipalities in Maryland in opposition to HB0487, not only is this legislation bad for Hagerstown, but it's also bad for the whole state and detrimental toward our city's public safety goals and initiatives. The Supreme Court recently struck down that local municipalities should have the authority to deal with ordinances and such when it comes to homelessness. This bill will take away our city's ability to address this issue head on, and in fact make it much worse.

HB0487 harms the dignity of individuals by incentivizing people to live in places that by HUD's definition are not meant for human habitation- public parks, cars, public sidewalks, and parking lots. This bill will have the opposite effect of its state intentions.

Hagerstown is committed to creating conditions that foster a continuum of care to better deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of unhoused individuals as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. HB0487 would hinder Hagerstown's ability to accomplish this goal in the following ways:

- a. This bill will send a message that camping on public property is an acceptable alternative to stable housing when in fact living on the streets detracts from



human dignity. Less people will be willing to accept services when living on the streets if legally and socially acceptable.

- b. More people prefer living on the street will choose to do so because there will be no consequences for doing so. Again, less people will be willing to accept services. For example, some clients in Hagerstown's legal system reported that the reminder of a consequence was the 'nudge' they needed to enter substance abuse treatment or behavior health treatment, and they were later glad that they chose treatment.
- c. HB0487 will attract people to Hagerstown from neighboring areas whose own jurisdictions prohibit camping in public spaces. People who want no prohibitions and no accountability will be most attracted to a place and state that has no consequences.
- d. This will hurt businesses. When people see tents, homelessness parked in front of their business on a public sidewalk, this will not incentivize customers to come to their business and will harm the entire community.
- e. Hagerstown will not be able to effectively carry out our duties and obligations in relation to public safety.

I may suggest the following:

- 1. Incentivize individuals to move toward stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency.
- 2. Support the building of more homes. More inventory in Maryland will make prices go down. Growth is key to our state's long-term economic outlook.
- 3. Refrain from placing onerous regulations on our shelters such as HB0093 and vote NO on that bill.
- 4. Create conditions that make housing more affordable in Maryland and bring higher paying jobs here.

HB0487 is a dangerous bill that could have long term consequences for our state. We have seen many failed cities like Portland, OR and San Francisco fail to adequately address public safety and were punished at the polls last November for failing to do so. Maryland and Hagerstown cannot afford to make the same mistake. I urge you all to vote against HB0487.

Thank You,

Sincerely,

Councilmember Sean Flaherty