



Testimony of People On the Go Maryland

House Bill 226 (Cross-file of Senate Bill 22)

Department of Disabilities – Housing Programs and Affiliated Foundations – Establishment

Primary Sponsor: Chair, Appropriations Committee

(By Request – Departmental – Disabilities, and by Request of the Governor)

House appropriations Hearing – March 25 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

to the Honorable members of the House Appropriations Committee:

People On the Go Maryland (POG) is a statewide self advocacy/systems advocacy organization run for and by people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Our mission is to empower individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities to speak for themselves, make their own decisions, and live the lives they choose in their communities. We represent the voices of Marylanders with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities who seek independence, dignity, and the fundamental right to live in communities of their choice.

People On the Go Maryland strongly recommends a **favorable report** on House Bill 226, the cross-file of Senate Bill 22.

The Housing Crisis Facing Marylanders with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities

- Adults with disabilities experience poverty at more than twice the rate of non-disabled peers.
- The maximum federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit of \$914 per month is insufficient to afford a one-bedroom apartment at fair market rent in any state.
- There is a national deficit of over 7 million affordable housing units.
- Less than 5% of housing is accessible for moderate mobility difficulties; less than 1% is accessible for wheelchair users.
- An estimated 7 million renters with disabilities are moderately or severely cost-burdened, spending over 30% of their income on rent.
- Nearly 25% of the 580,000+ people experiencing homelessness on any given night have a disability.
- The housing shortage forces many individuals into institutional settings against their will.

The Proven Benefits of Community-Based Housing and Integration

Community living leads to improved quality of life, greater autonomy, enhanced social integration, increased independence, and better health outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates that individuals in community settings develop broader social networks, more personal relationships, and greater community participation.

Moving from institutions to community residences is associated with increased independence and decreased maladaptive behaviors.

The "Housing First" model has been proven to increase housing stability, reduce homelessness, improve quality of life and clinical health indicators, and reduce costly emergency visits and hospitalizations.

The Legal Imperative: *Olmstead v. L.C.* and the Integration Mandate

The U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1999 decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* held that unjustified segregation of people with disabilities in institutions constitutes discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). States must provide services in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities.

As Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote, institutional confinement "perpetuates unwarranted assumptions that persons so isolated are incapable or unworthy of participating in community life."

In 2023, an estimated 692,000 people remained on waiting lists for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers. POG agrees with the amendments to HB 226. House Bill 226 directly addresses this gap by mandating housing programs under the Department of Disabilities.

The Essential Role of Affiliated Foundations in Sustainable Funding

Over 1,250 foundations nationally fund independent housing for people with disabilities, with collective assets of approximately \$879 billion.

Successful state programs demonstrate the viability of this approach. New York's Integrated Supportive Housing Program and Virginia's State Rental Assistance Program serve as proven models for expanding affordable, accessible housing through public-private partnerships.

House Bill 226 includes robust safeguards: affiliated foundations must operate under policies approved by the **Attorney General** and the **State Ethics Commission**, undergo **annual independent audits**, and submit **annual reports** to the Governor and Legislature. Foundation contributions are supplemental and not intended to replace regular state appropriations.

Positive Outcomes Expected from House Bill 226

- Creation of a statutory mandate for housing programs
- Expansion of affordable, accessible, and integrated housing options
- Reduction in unnecessary institutionalization and homelessness
- Enhanced compliance with the *Olmstead* integration mandate
- Establishment of sustainable funding mechanisms through affiliated foundations
- Improved health outcomes
- Greater independence, autonomy, and self-determination

- Relief for aging family supporters
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People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities deserve the same opportunities as all Marylanders to live independently, participate fully in their communities, and pursue their dreams. Housing is the foundation upon which all other aspects of community life are built. House Bill 226 provides the legislative framework and sustainable funding mechanisms necessary to address the severe housing crisis facing this population.

The evidence is clear and compelling: community-based housing leads to better outcomes, greater independence, and improved quality of life for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

For these reasons, People On the Go Maryland strongly recommends a favorable report on House Bill 226.

Contact Information

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