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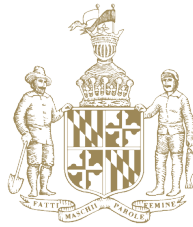
Government, Labor, and
Elections Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Election Law

Local Government/Bi-County
Agencies and Administration

Chair, Maryland Legislative
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama, Chair
Economic Matters Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 230
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 1501: Department of Housing and Community Development – Homeless Shelter Certification

Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Members of the Committee,

HB 1501 establishes a procedure for homeless shelter certification, implementing the Department of Housing and Community Development’s (DHCD) recommendations from its January 2025 Phase 1 Report required under SB 1107/HB 577 (2024)¹. The findings of that report highlight urgent oversight gaps affecting the safety, accessibility, and basic rights of Marylanders experiencing homelessness. HB 1501 creates a statutory framework that enables DHCD to adopt detailed certification, monitoring, and accountability standards that Maryland currently lacks.

According to the report, Maryland has 192 shelters with 7,103 beds, but 35% of those beds receive no federal or state funding and therefore operate with minimal oversight or required standards of care. Federal laws apply inconsistently, enforcement capacity is limited, and neither state nor local law requires shelters to maintain nondiscriminatory admissions processes, meet minimum habitability requirements, or provide grievance procedures for residents. Per the report, Maryland has statewide certification procedures for animal shelters but not homeless shelters, underscoring the need for a consistent statewide regulatory baseline.

To address these gaps, DHCD recommends 1) establishing a tiered shelter certification system, 2) adopting minimum safety, admissions, and operating standards, 3) creating a statewide grievance process, and 4) requiring on-site monitoring to ensure compliance. HB 1501 incorporates these recommendations. The bill requires DHCD to operate a certification program for all homeless shelters, defines the full range of shelter types consistent with DHCD’s taxonomy, and directs the Department to create a tiered certification structure based on shelter type, capacity, and service intensity.

¹[https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/DHCD/SB1107Ch152\(2024\)HB577Ch151\(2024\)_2025\(1\).pdf](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/DHCD/SB1107Ch152(2024)HB577Ch151(2024)_2025(1).pdf)

HB 1501 heeds DHCD's call for a staggered approval timeline so applications, inspections, and technical assistance can occur without overwhelming providers or the Department. By embedding this structure in statute, HB 1501 ensures a manageable, orderly implementation process.

The bill directs the Department to set requirements related to organizational governance, fiscal and administrative documentation, inspection protocols, renewal procedures, conditional approvals, and penalties for operating without certification. These elements directly correspond to the comprehensive application requirements, monitoring standards, and enforcement tools DHCD lays out in its Phase 1 recommendations. The bill is not prescriptive; instead, it creates the legal framework so DHCD can promulgate regulations rooted in stakeholder engagement, evidence-based practice, and so it can implement the multi-year strategy described in the report.

Finally, HB 1501 codifies DHCD's recommendation to establish a statewide grievance process for shelter residents, as well as DHCD's responsibility to conduct on-site monitoring to ensure shelters meet required standards. The Phase 1 Report identifies the absence of any centralized complaint mechanism or consistent oversight as a core gap in Maryland's current system. HB 1501 thus ensures shelter residents have recourse when their rights are violated and that shelters are held accountable for unsafe or discriminatory operations.

I have requested an amendment in partnership with the Department and local emergency management services to exempt certain emergency shelters to ensure our disaster response is not hampered in any way by the requirements that will be promulgated under this bill. Disaster shelters are meant to be temporary and flexible to address the needs that arise out of any given event, and thus this exemption does not violate the spirit of the bill.

HB 1501 is the vehicle required to put DHCD's recommendations into practice—recommendations that the General Assembly asked for in 2024. The Phase 1 Report makes clear that Maryland needs a statewide, consistent system of expectations for all shelters, particularly the large share that currently operate without federal or state funding or oversight. HB 1501 establishes the framework necessary for DHCD to implement the detailed standards, training, timelines, and monitoring processes that the Department, stakeholders, and national best practices all identify as essential.

Through this bill, we have an opportunity to make sure that all Marylanders experiencing homelessness are able to seek shelter that provides dignity, consistency, and accountability, no matter where they seek it. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1501.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kris Fair". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Delegate Kris Fair
District 3, Frederick County