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Secretary
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DATE: March 12, 2026
BILL NO.: House Bill 1501
TITLE: Homeless Shelter Certification Program - Establishment
COMMITTEE: House Economic Matters Committee

Letter of Support with Amendments

Description of Bill:

House Bill 1501 establishes a homeless shelter certification program in the Department of Housing and Community Development. The bill also requires the Department to perform on-site monitoring of certificated shelters, and to develop a grievance process that allows shelter residents to notify the Department of alleged violations of the certification requirements.

Background and Analysis:

Over 32,000 Marylanders experienced homelessness in FY2024. Approximately 16% of individuals were unsheltered, 67% were in emergency shelters, and 17% were in transitional shelters. Emergency and transitional shelters serve Maryland's most vulnerable citizens, who are at the highest risk of contracting illnesses, have chronic health conditions and disabilities, and who rely on shelters to meet their most basic needs for nutrition, personal hygiene, and sleeping accommodations. Shelters also serve highly vulnerable populations with complex needs, such as people fleeing from domestic violence, children, older adults, and chronically homeless individuals with disabilities. Due to this vulnerability and the nature of care being provided, it is critical that shelters operate with a minimum set of standards for habitability, quality of care, and staff and volunteers that are appropriately trained and equipped to meet the needs of shelter residents.

Only about one-third of the nearly 200 emergency and transitional shelters in operation across Maryland are funded by the State and have mandated standards and regular monitoring for compliance. The remaining shelters are funded by local government or private organizations, and subject to minimal local laws or regulations - or in some cases, none at all. DHCD frequently hears from individuals who have been denied entry into shelter based on their membership in a protected class, terminated from program services unfairly or in violation of federal laws, or experienced trauma and mistreatment while staying in shelters.

If the bill is enacted, DHCD intends to engage community partners to design the certification application process - including Continuums of Care, shelter service providers, local governments, and other state agencies. As dictated by the bill, the Department will develop a tiered system of shelter certification that reflects the wide variety of types of shelters. The Department also intends to provide training and technical assistance for service providers on the new regulations and how to come into compliance, in addition to providing an opportunity for corrective action prior to the implementation of any penalties for non-compliance.

DHCD Position

House Bill 1501 ensures that shelters provide a consistent and high-quality level of care for people experiencing homelessness. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 1501 with the following amendment, to ensure that State and Local emergency management agencies are not negatively impacted during times of natural disasters.



Page 2, line 2, strike [A PART OF A COUNTY’S EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN AND THAT OPENS AT] and substitute “CREATED OR AUTHORIZED BY A LOCAL OR STATE GOVERNMENT ENTITY TO RESPOND TO”

Page 2, line 4, after “DISASTER OR,” insert “MANMADE”

Page 2, lines 14-15, strike [A DISASTER OR HAZARD EMERGENCY SHELTER OR EMERGENCY MASS CARE SHELTER]

