

DATE: March 5, 2026
BILL NO.: House Bill 1353
TITLE: Homeless Individuals - Fee and Examination Exemptions
COMMITTEE: House Environment & Transportation Committee

Letter of Support

Description of Bill:

House Bill 1353 would reduce financial and legal barriers for homeless individuals to obtain employment, housing, public benefits, health care, and higher education by increasing access to identification documents and transportation. The bill has 4 key components:

1. Expands the types of vital records a homeless individual can obtain for free beyond just a birth certificate allowed under current state law, to now include copies of certificates or reports of death, fetal death, marriage, divorce, dissolution or annulment of marriage, adoption, or adjudication of paternity;
2. Eliminates vehicle registration fees and exempts inspections under certain conditions for vehicles owned and personally used by homeless individuals;
3. Eliminates initial drivers licensing fees for unaccompanied homeless youth; and
4. Reduces the length of time unaccompanied homeless youth under 19 must hold their learners permit before obtaining a provisional license from 9 months to 3 months

Background and Analysis:

Lack of identification and limited transportation are major, compounding barriers to securing stable housing and employment, particularly for low-income individuals and those experiencing homelessness. Without an ID, people cannot complete job applications, sign leases, opening bank account, enrolling in workforce programs or school, or accessing public benefits.¹ For people experiencing homelessness, obtaining ID is particularly challenging because of a lack of permanent address, documents lost to frequent moves or living in an unsheltered location, fees for duplicate copies, or being stuck in the “need an ID to get ID” loop.² Acquiring a birth certificate or social security card often requires a photo ID, yet obtaining a photo ID requires those documents.³

These challenges are even more profound for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. Maryland DHCD’s 2022 YouthREACH survey of homeless youth found:

¹ Movement Advancement Project. <https://www.mapresearch.org/file/ID-info-homelessness.pdf>

² Government Accountability Office. HOMELESSNESS: Barriers to Obtaining ID and Assistance Provided to Help Gain Access. GAO-24-105435. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24105435.pdf>. (2024)

³ Sanders C, Burnett K, Lam S, Hassan M, Skinner K. "You Need ID to Get ID": A Scoping Review of Personal Identification as a Barrier to and Facilitator of the Social Determinants of Health in North America. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 Jun 13;17(12):4227. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17124227. PMID: 32545798; PMCID: PMC7345293.

- 23% of youth cited lack of necessary documents as the primary barrier to accessing housing and employment assistance
- 14% reported trying to access identity documents within the last year and 18% reported needing assistance accessing identity documents
- 16% reported being enrolled in SNAP while 50% indicated they tried to enroll in SNAP in the last year and were denied

Similarly, poor transportation options restrict access to jobs and affordable housing – particularly in rural communities. Affordable housing is often located far from job centers, leading to long, expensive commutes, or in areas with poor transit access. In these communities, access to a car is essential for securing and maintaining employment, school, and engaging in workforce development programs.

Data collected by DHCD from Maryland Continuums of Care demonstrates significant gaps in employment and access to public benefits. To maximize permanent housing and employment outcomes while reducing length of time homeless, we must continue to rapidly reduce barriers for households experiencing a housing crisis – such as lack of ID or transportation. In FY25, 54% of adults who experienced homelessness in Maryland had zero cash income at entry into a homeless shelter or street outreach program. Only 31% reported they were receiving SNAP benefits and only 78% reported having health insurance.

This bill would significantly reduce barriers for both adults and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, enabling them to obtain ID faster and begin applying for jobs and housing as soon as possible after a housing crisis. It would also enable homeless individuals with access to reliable public transit to maintain or secure a vehicle at reduced cost, increasing their ability to travel to work or school and expand their housing options.

DHCD Position:

The Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 1353.

