

Bill Number: HB1353

FAV

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Since 2022, SHIP of Frederick County has assisted 182 students in obtaining a Maryland drivers license. SHIP provided comprehensive case management through the process exclusively to students experiencing homelessness. The majority of those students have been between the ages of 16 and 18.

Approximately 90% of those students lack a parent or guardian with both a valid driver's license and a vehicle. As a result, students are obtaining the required practice hours entirely through a driving school (not with a parent).

Currently, people who begin the permitting process before age 19 are required to wait 9 months before testing for their drivers license (those age 19 or older wait only 3 months). We understand that the intent is for these young people to spend that time practicing with a parent. SHIP's students are completing their driver education class and all necessary practice hours through the driving school in far less time than 9 months. Since they have no access to an adult with a vehicle to practice with, they are spending 4-6 months waiting to take their licensing test while obtaining no additional practice time behind the wheel. SHIP is actually seeing students lose driving skills in this time, rather than improve as the waiting period intends.

Youth experiencing homelessness play a crucial role in earning income for themselves and their families. Youth who do not graduate from high school are more than 3.5 times more likely to experience homelessness as adults. SHIP's goal is to keep youth connected to education while they earn necessary income in order to reduce their likelihood of experiencing homelessness as adults. The ability to drive immediately increases a young person's earning potential as well as their ability to reliably attend school.

The capacity of a young person experiencing homelessness is incredibly dependent on their access to transportation. Access to services such as clinic based healthcare, mental health and crisis care, food pantries, and career readiness programs all require the ability to attend in person. Apprenticeship, internship, and work study programs sponsored by the public school system all require transportation. Students without access to a vehicle are often ruled out of these programs before they are able to apply. Community college classes pose the same barrier for many. Even affordable housing outside of a city center becomes a viable option with appropriate transportation.

Reducing the wait time for youth experiencing homelessness from 9 months to 3 months will provide more equitable access to a variety of opportunities for these young people. The long term impact of this change will keep more youth connected to education, reducing the amount of adults who experience homelessness years from now. I urge you to consider making this change to allow the young people SHIP serves to thrive in our state.