



Maryland Safe Haven
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Iya Dammons, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1353 Homeless Individuals – Fee and Examination Exemptions

Good Afternoon Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alexis Blackmon-Newby, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Baltimore Safe Haven, an organization that serves LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness in Baltimore City. I am here to offer strong support for House Bill 1353.

House Bill 1353 is a practical, compassionate, and economically sound measure that removes unnecessary barriers preventing homeless individuals from accessing identification, transportation, and stability.

For the individuals we serve, the inability to pay a \$10 birth certificate fee or a vehicle registration cost is not a minor inconvenience — it can be the difference between securing employment and remaining unhoused.

Without a birth certificate or state ID:

- Individuals cannot apply for jobs.
- They cannot access certain benefits.
- They cannot secure housing.
- They cannot enroll in workforce training programs.

This bill ensures that a person experiencing homelessness can obtain one free vital record with verification from a service provider. That simple step can open the door to employment and housing.

Additionally, House Bill 1353 waives driver's license and vehicle registration fees for homeless individuals. Reliable transportation is often essential for employment — particularly for people working late shifts, multiple part-time jobs, or jobs outside public transit routes. By reducing these fees, the state is removing one more barrier to self-sufficiency.

Importantly, the bill also supports unaccompanied homeless youth by shortening the waiting period before they may take their driver's test. For young people without parental support, the ability to drive can mean access to school, work, and safety. This change acknowledges their unique vulnerability while maintaining education and safety requirements.



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From a fiscal standpoint, these are relatively small fees to the state but significant burdens to individuals experiencing homelessness. The long-term economic benefit of helping people secure employment and stability far outweighs the minimal short-term fee loss.

For LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness — who are disproportionately represented in homeless populations — these barriers are even more pronounced. Many have been rejected by family systems and lack access to the documentation and financial support others may take for granted. House Bill 1353 provides a pathway toward dignity and independence.

This bill does not eliminate accountability. It requires verification from a homeless service provider, ensuring integrity in the process while prioritizing access.

In short, House Bill 1353 removes structural barriers that keep people stuck in homelessness. It promotes mobility, employment, and stability. It affirms that poverty should not prevent someone from obtaining identification or lawful transportation.

I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1353.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.