



TESTIMONY FOR SB0049

Unhoused Individuals – Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense

Bill Sponsor: Senator Muse

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: **FAVORABLE**

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB0049 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

In every corner of the world, and certainly of the state of Maryland, you will find unhoused individuals. People who have no access to a fixed, adequate living space and are forced to reside on the street, in a car, or in other public spaces. They are often forced to move due to local ordinances for vagrancy and have had their meager possessions impounded.

This bill, if enacted, would affirm the basic rights of the unhoused. If there is no adequate shelter available, then threatening or imposing civil or criminal penalties on them violates the protection against cruel and unusual punishment and excessive fines guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. If a violation is made to the rights of an unhoused person, they have the right to bring civil action (or have the Attorney General bring action) against the jurisdiction or an official or agent of the state. They have the right to equitable relief and attorney fees if they prevail.

In this world, where the unhoused have so little dignity, this is an affirmation that we are still a just, caring society, and that we would show respect to those who have so little.

We strongly support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.