



CALVERT COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Board of Commissioners
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February 11, 2025

Via Electronic Mail

Calvert County Senators and Delegation

Re: HB487/SB484 - Unhoused Individuals - Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense

Senators and Delegation,

We write regarding concerns of the application of this draft legislation in Calvert County and ask that our Senators and Delegation work to incorporate an amendment that excludes Calvert County from this legislation for the reasons explained below.

This Bill, intended to protect the rights of unhoused individuals, ironically undermines local efforts to address the complex challenges of homelessness. By severely restricting local government intervention, it jeopardizes the delivery of crucial services, increases municipal liability, and raises serious public health and safety concerns. Unfortunately, this Bill arrives at a time when communities are already grappling with the housing crisis, the opioid epidemic, and a surge in mental and behavioral health issues, all contributing to the growing unhoused population. Calvert County recently invested in a new shelter on Main Street in Prince Frederick and has heavily invested in social services, public health initiatives, and public safety resources to combat these problems. However, this Bill threatens to cripple these efforts and hinder the provision of life-saving assistance.

Additionally, the Bill's "adequate housing" standard poses a significant challenge. Many existing shelters, while safe and accessible, may not meet these new requirements. This could leave local non-profits with no recourse for intervention without facing substantial legal risks. Such a constraint would drastically reduce interactions between service providers and unhoused individuals, prolonging homelessness and deepening the crisis.

Furthermore, the Bill's allowance of large encampments on public land creates significant public health risks. Without established sanitation protocols and resources, the potential for human waste accumulation and disease transmission is high, potentially leading to serious health crises. The elimination of civil penalties also removes a valuable tool for the county to encourage participation in services and programs. While vagrancy penalties are seldom enforced, they can provide motivation for individuals, particularly those struggling with addiction, to seek help.

While SB 484 seeks to address concerns regarding the treatment of unhoused individuals, it ultimately generates unintended and harmful consequences for communities. Rather than offering practical solutions, it weakens local responses, elevates public safety risks, and diminishes the capacity of service providers to assist those in need. Effective, practical solutions to the housing crisis are more critical than ever. This Bill, unfortunately, moves in the opposite direction, placing communities at greater risk. We therefore respectfully request that Calvert County be excluded from the scope of this proposed legislation.

Sincerely,
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
CALVERT COUNTY, MARYLAND



Earl F. Hance, President



Todd Ireland, Vice President



Mark C. Cox Sr.



Catherine M. Grasso



Mike Hart