

Talking Points: HB 206/SB 207—Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services

BILL SYNOPSIS

HB 206 Lead sponsor: Del. Carol Krimm • House Appropriations Committee

SB 207 Lead sponsor: Sen. Mary Washington • Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

The bill would allow an unaccompanied minor experiencing or at risk of homelessness (as well as the minor's child or children) to consent to admission to an emergency shelter or housing program and receive related services.

BILL BACKGROUND

This bill was first introduced in 2019 in response to requests from Maryland service providers who wish to provide this service and requested clarity in the law. This year's bill incorporates recommendations from the resulting workgroup.

BILL TALKING POINTS

- During the 2016-2017 school year, Maryland public schools identified 2,337 unaccompanied students without homes – who lacked stable housing and were not in physical custody of a parent or guardian.
- Youth experiencing homelessness who are not connected with family face significant barriers to housing, health care and other crucial services.
 - Obtaining parental consent usually isn't possible.
 - Right now, minors are not legally able to contract for rental housing or a hotel room.
 - The child welfare system is unable to provide housing and services for minors who aren't eligible for foster care services.
- Without access to safe shelter, kids are vulnerable to exploitation, dangerous living situations and school drop-out.
- Providing housing and supportive services to unaccompanied youth is a critical step toward ending their homelessness.

BILL PUSHBACK...

- Unaccompanied minors without homes already have access to youth emergency shelters.
 - **Possible response:** *That's true. But because Maryland law doesn't specifically establish their legal capacity to consent, many service providers choose not to provide shelter because it is unclear whether and how they can do so lawfully.*
- What about parental rights?
 - **Possible response:** *This bill wouldn't affect parental rights. The parental notification requirements in this bill are identical to federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act regulations that have governed federally-funded emergency shelters for unaccompanied homeless minors operating in Maryland and across the country since the 1970s.*
- There should be a minimum age limit for consenting to shelter.
 - **Possible response:** *By allowing minors of any age to enter a shelter facility, HB 206 will provide a safe place where they can be connected to the child welfare system if appropriate. This is consistent with Maryland law permitting unaccompanied minors of any age to consent to their own medical care. And it's consistent with federal regulations and current practices of existing federally-funded emergency shelters for unaccompanied homeless minors in Maryland.*