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Ways and Means Committee

Subcommittees

Early Childhood

Local Revenues



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Press Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MARYLAND LEGISLATORS PLAN TO REVISIT RIGHTS OF UNHOUSED INDIVIDUALS FOR A FUTURE SESSION; NARROWS HB487 TO REPEALING MUNICIPAL VAGRANCY ORDINANCES

ANNAPOLIS, MD — Delegate Bernice Mireku-North (District 14) and Senator C. Anthony Muse (District 26) announced changes to House Bill 487/Senate Bill 484 “Unhoused Individuals - Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense”, narrowing its scope to repealing municipalities’ authority to use vagrancy as a tool to criminalize homelessness. This narrowed focus mirrors a [2024 bill](#) sponsored by Delegate Mireku-North and passed by the House of Delegates. The bill's sponsors say that the Supreme Court’s 2024 decision in *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson* was the catalyst for the original legislation to strengthen the rights of unhoused individuals, including causes of action and an affirmative defense of necessity for trespassing and disturbing the peace. The introduction of the bill opened up necessary conversations on the state of care for the unhoused across Maryland. Further discussion with stakeholders is needed to develop a stronger bill that reflects Maryland’s commitment to decriminalizing homelessness, while respecting the fiscal and logistical realities of implementing these new rights and protections.

“With the nation, and particularly Maryland, facing a rising unhoused population, we must address the crisis at the local level” said Delegate Mireku-North, “We need practical, thoughtful laws to ensure that unhoused individuals have access to safe, dignified shelter, not a jail cell. As we work towards our goals of affordable housing for all, Maryland needs to continue our work on expanding protections for unhoused individuals well into the future.”

“Criminalizing homelessness does not address the root causes and only perpetuates hardship.” said Senator C. Anthony Muse, “In fact, it adds to the burden on the state and communities. It is both immoral and counterproductive to punish people for simply existing in public while they are denied access to adequate housing. Let’s be clear, housing should be a fundamental human right, not only in the world, but at least here in the United States of America, but in reality, it is not. By offering these protections, Maryland would join other states like California and Oregon, which have passed similar laws to ensure that people without homes are not unfairly penalized for merely trying to survive.”

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