



Testimony in Support of HB 577

Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth – Continuation, Membership, Stipend, and Duties

House Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2014

Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly supports HB 577, which reauthorizes Maryland's Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth for one year, adds additional members, provides stipends for youth participants, and establishes a Youth Advisory Board.

Maryland Hunger Solutions works to fight hunger and improve the nutrition, health, and well-being of children and families in Maryland. We use a three-pronged strategy to overcome barriers and create self-sustaining connections between Maryland residents and nutritious foods. Maryland Hunger Solutions works with state and community partners to:

- Maximize participation in all federal nutrition programs through a combination of removal of obstacles to participation, close work with social service agencies and outreach.
- Educate the public and key stakeholders both to the stark reality of hunger's existence in Maryland and to solutions that are already at hand.
- Improve public policies to end hunger, reduce poverty, and promote nutrition.

In 2013, the General Assembly established the Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. The Task Force released an extensive report and recommendations on November 1, 2013, which included a recommendation that the General Assembly reauthorize the Task Force for a time-limited period to facilitate the implementation of its recommendations, which promise to greatly improve outcomes for unaccompanied homeless youth in Maryland.

Maryland Hunger Solutions supports the recommendations made by the Task Force, particularly the vision that all unaccompanied homeless youth in Maryland will have adequate economic stability to obtain stable, permanent housing and meet other basic needs. To achieve this goal, the Task Force identified several objectives, including ensuring that unaccompanied homeless youth and youth exiting foster care are able to successfully access and maintain public benefits.

Public benefits, such as the Food Supplement Program, provide an essential support during times of need. The Food Supplement Program fights poverty and supports healthy eating. In addition,

every dollar in Food Supplement Program benefits spent in the community generates \$1.85 in local economic activity.

Unaccompanied homeless youth are a distinct and vulnerable population in need of targeted, developmentally-appropriate supports. The Task Force Report brought much-needed attention to the experiences of unaccompanied homeless youth, but a sustained focus on implementation of its recommendations is needed to guarantee meaningful change. HB 577 ensures that the positive momentum and collaborative interagency engagement achieved through creation of the Task Force will continue.

Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on HB 577.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Wilson, Director

Maryland Hunger Solutions