



**Testimony:
Lisa Stambolis
Director of Pediatrics
Health Care for the Homeless**

Before the

Maryland House of Delegates: Appropriations Committee

On

**HB 1224: Ending Youth Homelessness Act of 2018
SUPPORT**

March 13, 2018
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland

Thank you, Chairperson McIntosh and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lisa Stambolis and I am the Director of Pediatrics at Health Care for the Homeless in Baltimore. ***I am writing to provide testimony in support of HB 1224.***

Health Care for the Homeless is a federally qualified health center that works to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy and community engagement. We serve a diverse client base spanning racial, ethnic, sexual and gender identities. We serve clients of all ages, from elderly adults to infant children to unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. And while the unaccompanied youth who come through our doors have access to similar medical, mental health and supportive services as our adult clients, we at Health Care for the Homeless understand that, systemically, these services are severely limited and lacking across Maryland.

We also know that our younger clients, specifically our unaccompanied youth, face barriers to housing, health care and supportive services that other age cohorts seldom experience. These barriers can be more difficult to navigate for unaccompanied youth, depending on how they identify. Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness do not have the access to resources that younger children and adults often have, or are often reluctant to seek out resources or services because of the stigmas associated with being young and experiencing homelessness.

We support HB 1224 because it establishes a grant program at the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development that allocates funding for housing and supportive services for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness who are marginalized and underserved. ***By supporting HB 1224, you can directly help these young people access the resources they desperately need to live healthier, more stable lives.***

As our Director of Pediatrics, I have first-hand experience providing health care to youth experiencing homelessness. I recall my client "Erin:" On her 18th birthday, her parents drove her from Anne Arundel County to Baltimore City and dropped her off on a random street corner with nothing but an overnight bag and a few dollars because she was transgendered. It was December; it was cold. Her parents said that now that she was "grown," she could find out what it's like to "live the lifestyle she had chosen." Her plan for the night, to be safe, was to go to the local emergency room and pretend to be sick so that she wouldn't have to be on the street in the middle of the night. She was raised in a protected home environment, and knew nothing about the dangers of the city streets as a young, white, naïve transgendered teenager. I put her up in a hotel for two nights because I knew that she could be harmed, even murdered, if left on her own, on the street, without safe shelter. I was able to help her find a place to live in Washington, D.C. a few days later, but only because Baltimore, and the larger state of Maryland, had lacked resources for her, including the fundamental safety of stable shelter.

I also work with many youth who transition out of foster care without their medications or any understanding of where to go for medical care. They have no medical insurance and need help addressing serious medical challenges like asthma and diabetes. By the time I treat them, they are disproportionately sick and unstable because they did not know where to go or what to do. As a pediatric nurse practitioner for 24 years working in Baltimore City, I have witnessed countless youth experiencing homelessness who lack basic human needs, including housing and health care, and suffer emotionally and physically as a result. They need our help.

By supporting HB 1224, you are supporting all unaccompanied youth experiencing homeless across Maryland access housing, health care and other critical supports and services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions if you contact me at lstambolis@hchmd.org.