



February 24, 2025

Judicial Proceedings Committee
Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **SB 484** – Unhoused Individuals - Rights, Civil Action, and Affirmative Defense– **Oppose**

Dear Senator Smith:

SB 484 would grant homeless individuals the right to encamp, with all that involves, on public property.

This is a debate that has been played out across the country in recent years. Many cities like Portland, Oregon, Seattle, Washington, and San Francisco, California, among others, should well serve as lessons learned. All of these cities have seen severe consequences to this action. Many businesses have left downtown areas; as have residents. We do not want to see these situations being played out here in Maryland.

Along with issues of safety for those in such camps, environmental stewardship and public health, unregulated homeless camping will severely challenge our emergency responders and has led to an increase in crime; thus, requiring an increase in police forces and emergency medical staff.

Homeless encampments increase the risk of transmitting communicable diseases. According to research from Liu et al.(2020, p2), “living in crowded conditions has greater exposure to pathogens, which increases the risk of tuberculosis and diarrheal illnesses.” Liu et al. (2020) also reports an increase in other communicable diseases among the homeless populations such as lice, hepatitis, syphilis, invasive streptococcal infections and HIV.

This bill will allow anyone to set up a “camp” at your local park, at the courthouse lawn, and camp along the walkway in your hometown. This bill will create hardships and challenges for residents and law enforcement. We will lose economic activity, business and eventually residents (our tax base).

A *far* better long-term goal would be to aid the homeless population in managing their mental and physical health disparities, provide numerous community supports on an ongoing basis and continue to offer supports regarding employment opportunities so they may get jobs and become



productive members of society. Meeting people where they are and accepting them in their environment usually leads to better outcomes.

There is no one answer to how to solve this problem, but a bill such as this with numerous negative ramifications, now and in the future, is not the solution.

The Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, a business advocacy organization of nearly 700 members, opposes this bill. We therefore request that you give this bill an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike McMullin".

Mike McMullin
President
Carroll County Chamber of Commerce

CC: Delegate Chris Tomlinson
Senator Justin Ready