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www.DisabilityRightsMD.org

Disability Rights Maryland

February 23, 2021

City Council Bill 21-0004—Office to End Homelessness- Establishment, Administration,
and Permanent Housing Voucher Program

Position: **SUPPORT**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM – formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities and live in safe, decent, affordable and accessible housing.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Bill 21-0004. DRM supports Bill 21-0004. Investing in tenant based rental assistance prevents people with disabilities from being unnecessarily institutionalized and keeps them as members of their own communities.

People with disabilities have historically been forced into institutional settings, including state hospitals, nursing homes, and the criminal justice system.¹ This history contributes to persons with disabilities facing numerous and substantial barriers to fair and affordable housing from both the private and public housing sectors. Additionally, people with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty than their non-disabled peers. A 2017 survey by Cornell found that 42.6% of Marylanders with disabilities between the ages of 21-64 were employed, compared to 82.4% of Marylanders without disabilities.² This results in a disproportionate numbers of people with disabilities experiencing homelessness and, according to point-in-time (PIT) counts conducted in January 2017 by communities across the country, it is estimated that on any given day nearly one-quarter (24%) of individuals experiencing homelessness (86,962 of 369,081 individuals) are people with disabilities who met the federal definition of experiencing chronic homelessness.³

Studies have found that people with disabilities experiencing homelessness who moved to permanent supportive housing experienced marked reductions in shelter use, hospitalizations (regardless of type), length of stay per hospitalization, and time incarcerated. In a study done in New York, prior to living in permanent supportive housing, people with severe mental illness experiencing homelessness in the study used an average of \$40,449 per person per year in such services. The total average savings for the city were \$23,172 per person housed. For the approximately 100 vouchers that CB 21-0004 funds, this would be over \$2 million dollars in savings in services.

This Bill creates a housing for people in permanent supportive housing who no longer desire to receive services but who are still extremely low-income and need rental assistance. This model relieves pressure on existing permanent supportive housing resources allowing Baltimore City to target those resources for families who want and

¹ K. C. Lakin, S. Larson, P. Salmi, and A. Webster (2010). *Residential Services for Persons with Developmental Disabilities: Status and Trends through 2009*, University of Minnesota, <http://rtc.umn.edu/docs/risp2009.pdf>

² Cornell University, *Disability Status Report, United States*(2017)

³ *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2017)



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need supportive services in their housing. The \$1.3 million allocated will help provide housing vouchers to Marylanders with disabilities whose need for the voluntary supportive services has decreased as their housing stability has increased, but still need rental assistance to continue to reside in the communities. For those who are on restricted incomes such as SSI - which often is only \$765 a month, this is critical to remaining housed and not in institutional settings such as state hospitals, shelter, prisons, jails, or homeless.

Further, consistent the Consent Decree between the United States, the Baltimore City Police Department, and the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, Baltimore City has an obligation to provide adequate community-based services for persons with disabilities to avoid unnecessary law enforcement encounters.⁴ People with disabilities experiencing homelessness are the subject of routine police encounters for minor offenses, such as trespass. The result of these encounters is too frequently institutionalization or incarceration. In a 2019 symposium convened by Disability Rights Maryland, Behavioral Health Systems Baltimore, and Open Societies Institute-Baltimore, relevant stakeholders and members of the Baltimore community were asked to identify the number one priority to reduce unnecessary police encounters. Overwhelming, people identified housing as the number one priority. The provision of an array of housing services to people experiencing homeless is necessary to avoid the criminalization and institutionalization of people with disabilities.

For all of these reasons, DRM urges a favorable report on City Council bill 21-0004. Thank you for considering our views. Please do not hesitate to contact Corinne "Cory" Warren at 410-727-6352, ext. 2472 or by e-mail at Cwarren@disabilityrightsmd.org.

⁴ *United States v. Baltimore City Police Department and Mayor and City Council of Baltimore City*, 1:17-cv-00099-JKB (D. Md.)