



HEARING NOTES

Bill: 21-0004

Office to End Homelessness – Establishment, Administration, and Permanent Housing Voucher Program

Committee: Economic and Community Development

Chaired By: Councilwoman Sharon Green Middleton

Hearing Date: February 23, 2021

Time (Beginning): 2:05 PM

Time (Ending): 4:20 PM

Location: Virtual WEBEX

Total Attendance: ~80

Committee Members in Attendance:

John Bullock Mark Conway Ryan Dorsey Antonio Glover Robert Stokes Odette Ramos

Bill Synopsis in the file?..... yes no n/a

Attendance sheet in the file? yes no n/a

Agency reports read? yes no n/a

Video or audio-digitally recorded? yes no n/a

Certification of advertising/posting notices in the file? yes no n/a

Evidence of notification to property owners? yes no n/a

Final vote taken at this hearing? yes no n/a

Motioned by:Councilmember

Seconded by:Councilmember

Final Vote:

Major Speakers

(This is not an attendance record.)

- Councilmember Ryan Dorsey, Sponsor
- Ms. Marilyn Mosby, State’s Attorney

- Ms. Elena DiPietro, Law Department
- Ms. Katie Yorick, Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services
- Ms. Michelle Wirzberger, Baltimore Police Department
- Mr. D’Paul Nibber, Baltimore City Health Department
- Ms. Stephanie Murdock, Department of Housing and Community Development
- Mr. William Welles, Housing Authority of Baltimore City
- Ms. Mara James, Finance Department
- Ms. Tisha Edwards, Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services
- Mr. Dan Bowers
- Mr. Matt Hill, attorney, Public Justice Center
- Mr. Peter Cimboric, Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership
- Ms. Harriett Smith, Waverly resident, Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition,
- Ms. Delaney Anderson, resident, Public Health Law Clinic (student)
- Ms. Carolyn Johnson, manager and attorney, Homeless Project Representation Project
- Ms. Hannah Roberts, former employee of Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services
- Ms. Robyn Dorsey, Fair Housing Director, Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland
- Ms. Tisha Guthrie, Commissioner, Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Ms. Onyinye Alhieri, East Baltimore
- Ms. Lawanda Williams, Health Care for the Homeless
- Mr. Jeff Garrett, advocate for the homeless
- Mr. Corey Warren, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights of Maryland
- Mr. Achike Oranye, Division Director, People Encouraging People

Major Issues Discussed

1. Councilwoman Middleton opened the meeting, introduced committee members and City representatives, and read the bill into the record.
2. Councilman Dorsey explained the purpose of the bill. He provided a brief overview of what the bill would accomplish. The bill proposes to permanently establish the Office to End Homelessness and a permanent housing voucher program, similar to the nationally known Moving On program which offers wrap-around services.
3. State’s Attorney Mosby testified in support of the bill. She explained how housing and public safety are interconnected due to criminal activities of those experiencing financial desperation which can lead to criminal records.
4. Ms. Elena DiPietro presented the Law Department’s revised report and proposed amendments. She discussed Law Department’s concerns regarding the Council’s authority to create a new voucher program under the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC). She also discussed concerns about program funding sources, contracting with housing providers and the process for termination of assistance to lessees by the new office.
5. Ms. Katie Yorick expressed support for initiatives to combat homelessness. She, however, expressed programmatic and policy concerns with the bill, as it relates to the following: termination of assistance (for tenants or those holding project-based vouchers); the appeals

process; return to permanent support housing; sources of funding; income levels of the homeless in the event funding sources are not available; staffing support and qualified hearing officers; and the sustainability and stability of the proposed program. Ms. Yorick suggested that language in Section 4-19(G) of the bill be amended to clarify program rules and regulations so that a non-profit provider does not exercise subjectivity in determining what a breach or “good cause” is for termination of a lease. Councilmember Dorsey explained that the new office would be responsible for the creation of rules and regulations.

6. Agency representatives spoke in support of their respective agency’s report.
7. Mr. Bill Welles testified that establishment of a voucher program, similar to that which already exists under the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC), may create confusion in delivery of services to the same population.
8. Ms. Mara James explained that a transfer of functions of the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services to the proposed Office to End Homelessness could be cost neutral. She explained, however, that the cost to provide vouchers and associated other costs, which include moving expenses, utilities, furniture; in addition to new staff positions and part-time hearing officers, technology and housing inspections, could be funded from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF), however, the source of funding for AHTF is unpredictable.
9. Committee members discussed the bill and asked questions. Some of the questions focused on how the bill focuses on the targeted population of currently homeless individuals. Those who are currently housed in a permanent housing voucher program would not be eligible. The committee also discussed staffing resources for the new office; appropriations from AHTF; termination procedures; waiting lists; the impact of the waiting list on those with fixed incomes; consequences to persons exiting the program; HUD waiver of certain provisions; transfer of persons back into permanent supportive housing; low income tax credits for persons in permanent supportive housing; whether utilities are included in the voucher program; an agency’s application for funds from AHTF; new positions and salaries; as well as the efficiency of establishing and implementing the proposed office.
10. Ms. Tisha Edwards testified that the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) is funded through State Community Development Block Grant funds. She also explained that MOHS provides energy and water bill assistance as well as eviction prevention. There is a desire to work in partnership with other agencies toward shared goals aimed at supporting families. She emphasized that dedicated resources are needed to implement the program outlined in the bill.
11. Public testimony was taken.
 - Mr. Dan Bowers testified and asked questions. He wanted to know if the City Council could work with the current administration to fulfill one of the mayor’s goals to hire a new person to oversee MOHS. He also asked why a fiscal note had not been provided; why there was an effort to create a new voucher program rather than build affordable housing; why would people leave a federally-funded program to seek housing from a newly implemented City program; and why would landlord’s participate in the new program when proposed regulations were not helpful to them?
 - Mr. Matt Hill testified in support of the bill. He explained that the bill addresses many concerns about homelessness. He indicated that the 2021 Baltimore City Mayor’s Transition Report (page 38) <https://mayor.baltimorecity.gov/news/press-releases/2021-02-09-mayor-scott-releases-transition-report> shows a recommendation to support the voucher program. He indicated that AHTF’s allocation to the voucher program is the only

one in City government designated specifically to address the needs of the homeless. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), with input from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Commission, has proposed \$1.3 million for the voucher program. He also suggested that funds from the designated real estate surtax could continue to serve as a permanent revenue source for the voucher program.

- Mr. Peter Cimboric testified in support of the bill. He explained that Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership administers programs similar to the one proposed in the bill. He contested the Department of Finance’s cost analysis regarding the total cost to administer a voucher program; cost of hearing officers; cost of staffing and related services; and administrative fees paid to public housing employees.
 - Ms. Harriett Smith testified regarding documentation for homeless services applicants and the barriers that prevent participation in homeless programs.
 - Ms. Delaney Anderson spoke about the need for affordable housing and health care services for the homeless.
 - Ms. Carolyn Johnson testified about homelessness, affordable housing and systemic racism. She stressed the need for a local housing voucher program and equity goals.
 - Ms. Hannah Roberts testified in support of the bill and stressed the need for the proposed local housing voucher program. She also expressed concerns about limited funding for the new program as well as the potential for sustainability.
 - Ms. Robyn Dorsey spoke about impediments to free and fair housing choices and the availability of public subsidies for affordable housing.
 - Ms. Tisha Guthrie testified in support of the bill. She spoke about the need to reduce homelessness and provide affordable housing.
 - Ms. Onyinye Alhieri spoke about the need to address homelessness amongst drug users.
 - Ms. Lawanda Williams expressed support for the bill and the need for permanent-supportive housing for the homeless. Housing is a human right. Returning to the program should be a viable option.
 - Mr. Jeff Garrett testified in support of the bill and the voucher program.
 - Mr. Cory Warren testified regarding the rights of the disabled who are homeless. He testified in support of permanent-supportive housing. He also stated that housing is essential to deterring contact with police.
 - Mr. Achike Oranye supports the bill.
12. Councilmember Dorsey offered final comments about the need for the bill. He also expressed appreciation for those that support the bill. Committee members expressed a desire to review testimony and proposed amendment.
13. The hearing was recessed.

Further Study

Was further study requested?

Yes No

If yes, describe.

Committee Vote:

Sharon Green Middleton, Chair:.....
John Bullock:
Mark Conway:
Ryan Dorsey:
Antonio Glover:.....
Robert Stokes:.....
Odette Ramos:

Jennifer L. Coates, Committee Staff

Date: March 1, 2021

cc: Bill File
OCS Chrono File