



# **SAFE SHELTERS NOW!**

## **Shelter Conditions Report**

### **Housing Our Neighbors**

**Research Committee**

**September 2025**

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# About Housing Our Neighbors (HON)

Housing Our Neighbors is a community organization made up of homeless, formerly homeless, allies, and advocates fighting for the right to housing in Baltimore City.

Over the past 10 years, HON has worked on campaigns to stop the closure of encampments, fight back against bills that would criminalize panhandling, create the affordable housing trust fund, and empty the shelters during the pandemic.

We believe in a Baltimore where the basic human right to housing is a reality for everyone.

We work to create a city without homelessness.

We believe that all people in Baltimore should have access to a decent, affordable home, and be adequately and safely housed within an atmosphere of acceptance and human dignity.

For more information about Housing Our Neighbors, visit our website at <https://www.honbaltimore.org/>

# Overview

Baltimore City shelter residents have long raised the alarm about undignified, inhumane, and dangerous conditions within city shelters. Residents frequently talk about brown water coming out of faucets, dirty linens, lack of safety, bed bugs, and lack of staff compassion or care. The levers that we currently have for holding shelters accountable depend on funding source. Some shelters receive no federal, state, or city funds and can't be held accountable the way shelters that receive public funding could be. But regardless of funding, shelters should be delivering quality care and services to our neighbors.

Housing Our Neighbors has conducted a survey of over 70 unhoused neighbors to get a better understanding of how shelters are failing our community. More than 70 % of residents at some sites rank their services and cleanliness at a 3 or below. Shelter residents gave shelter conditions overall a score of 5.1 out of 10. Only 49.5% of shelter residents are aware of the grievance policy at the shelter they are staying at. Code Purple and Helping Up Mission both scored a 3.4 out of 10 for cleanliness. Baltimore Rescue Mission (2.5), Helping Up Mission (3.8) and TIME Organization (3.88) earned the lowest food scores.

The federally funded HUD Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) and state- funded Maryland Homelessness Solutions Program (HSP) provide funding to the Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) which leads the Baltimore City Continuums of Care (CoCs).

The CoC coordinates funding and resources for some shelter providers in Baltimore City including Weinberg Housing and Resource Center, SCS Youth Resource/Drop-In Center, Healthcare for the Homeless's Convalescent Care Program, Project PLASE's Temporary Housing for Vulnerable Adults, St. Vincent dePaul's Beans and Bread, Sarah's Hope and FrontDoor, and TIME Organization's Men's and Women's Shelter.

Both programs have minimum habitability, safety, and sanitation standards that grantees are required to follow. HSP also requires shelter providers to follow Housing

First Principles. Some shelters get no money from the CoC and therefore don't have to follow ANY regulations outside of the City's building code.

We KNOW that shelters do not follow many of these regulations and MOHS does not enforce accountability. We also know that the Trump Administration plans to weaken shelter standards and accountability by issuing "block grants" with less regulations.

**If we want shelters to be safe places, regardless of who is in the White House or City Hall, we need shelters to be licensed and held accountable NOW!**

**HAS TO BE LICENSED**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nursing homes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hotels
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Animal shelters	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Schools
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rental housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Therapists
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hospitals	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Electricians
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restaurants	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Catering
<input type="checkbox"/> Homeless shelters	

**Everyone deserves safe, dignified housing.**  
**Pass HB93 / SB234 to establish a Homeless Shelter Certification Program**

Under current law, homeless shelters in Maryland are not required to follow any minimum health or safety standards. To address this critical need, HON launched a campaign earlier this year to support SB234/HB93, a bill in the Maryland General Assembly that would have created a certification program for Maryland's homeless shelters.

The bill, requested by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), would have established: (1) a shelter resident bill of rights; (2) a minimum standard for shelters to ensure the protection of those rights; and (3) a

grievance process for shelter residents whose rights are being violated within the shelter system.

An amended version of this bill was passed during the 2024 session, which called for a study of current shelter conditions and the development of recommendations for how a shelter licensing/certification program could be established in the state. This

year, the bill was introduced again and was heard in both the House Environment and Transportation Committee and the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. The bill passed the subcommittee vote in the House. However, it was never brought to a vote by the full committee, so it did not make it across the finish line this year.

We believe that all shelters, regardless of funding sources, should treat residents with dignity and respect, and need to be held accountable. Find more information about HON at [honbaltimore.org](http://honbaltimore.org).

# Shelter Survey Metrics

Full Data Dashboard <https://tinyurl.com/honsurveydata>

## Background

Over the summer of 2025, HON surveyed 74 current and former residents of Baltimore City homeless shelters. We asked them to name one shelter they currently or recently resided at, then rank their overall experience, cleanliness, facilities (working toilets, showers, lights, AC, etc.), food, staff supportiveness, and grievance process of that shelter.

## Key Citywide Findings

- **Average overall satisfaction is 5.1 / 10**, a failing grade that captures the citywide pulse on current shelter conditions.
- **32.8 % of respondents rated their overall experience 3 or below**, signaling deep dissatisfaction.
- 74 total people surveyed.

## Theme-Level Red Flags

- **Lowest-rated theme:** *Grievance process* on average rates **4.3 / 10**.
- **Other weak spots:** Food (4.8), Cleanliness (5.5), Staff Supportiveness (5.7), Facilities (5.7)/10
- **Low-score prevalence by theme** (ratings 1–3):
  - Grievance process – **47 %**
  - Food – **43 %**
  - Facilities – **29 %**
  - Cleanliness – **26 %**
  - Staff Supportiveness – **25 %**

## Shelter-Level Accountability

- More than 50% of respondents at several major shelters rank key measures at a 1–3 out of ten indicating extremely poor experiences.
- More than **70 %** of residents at some sites rank their services and cleanliness at a 3 or below.
- Code Purple and Helping Up Mission got the **lowest cleanliness score, 3.4 out of 10**
- Baltimore Rescue Mission (**2.5**), Helping Up Mission (**3.8**) and TIME Organization (**3.88**) earned the **lowest food scores**

## Grievance Awareness Gap

- Only **45.95 % of survey participants are aware that a grievance policy exists at their shelter at all**, revealing a serious information and access problem.

The following pages show visualizations of survey data which are also available at <https://tinyurl.com/honsurveydata>.

# Shelter Survey Metrics

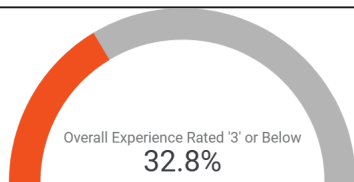
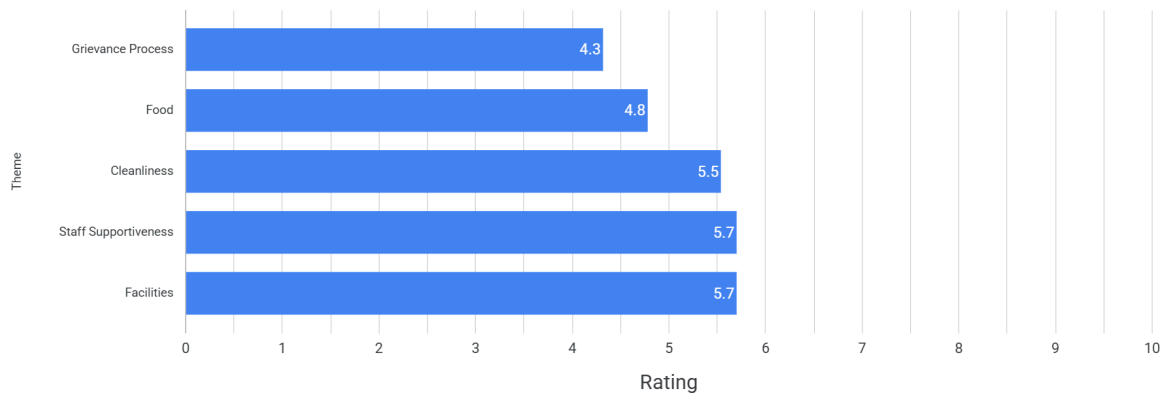
## 1 Overview Metrics

5.1

Average Overall Satisfaction

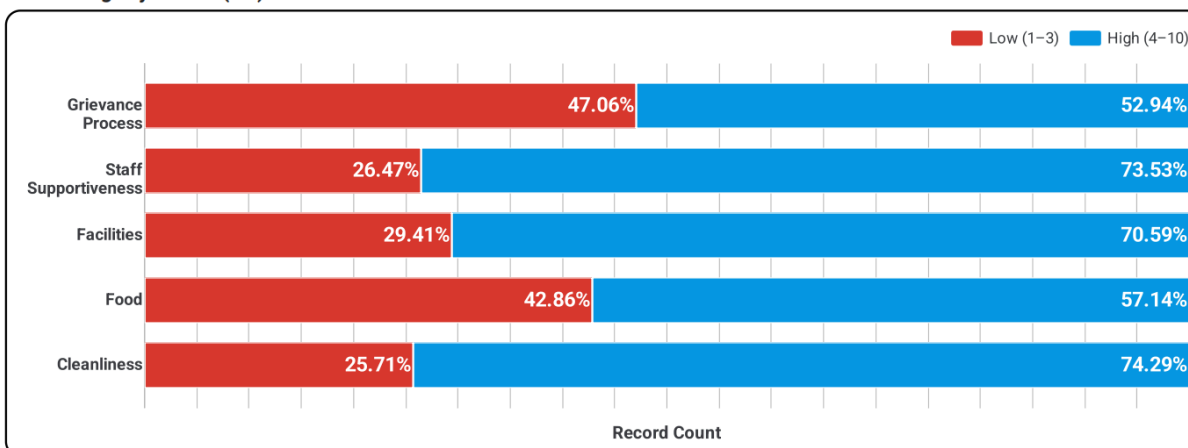
*This average reflects every survey response we've received. It's the citywide pulse on how well Baltimore's shelters are serving residents today.*

Rating by Theme



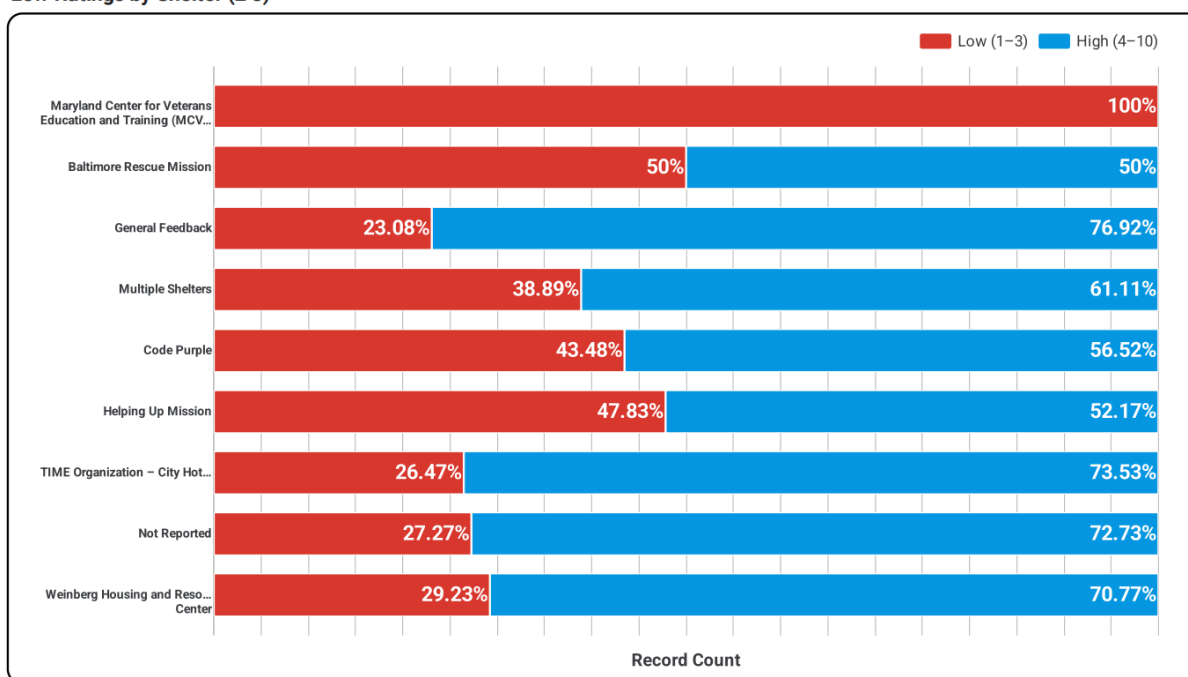
*Out of all the responses we received, this figure represents the percentage that scored **overall satisfaction** at a **3 or lower**.*

### Low Ratings by Theme (≤ 3)



Here, we break out the low ratings by THEME as a percentage of total responses received. **Note that not all survey respondents replied to every question.**

### Low Ratings by Shelter (≤ 3)

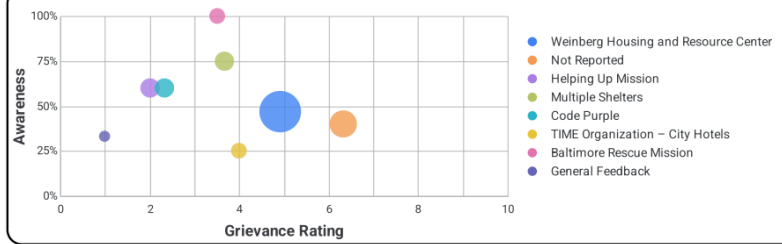


Here, we break out the low ratings by SHELTER as a percentage of total responses received. **Note that not all survey respondents replied to every question.**

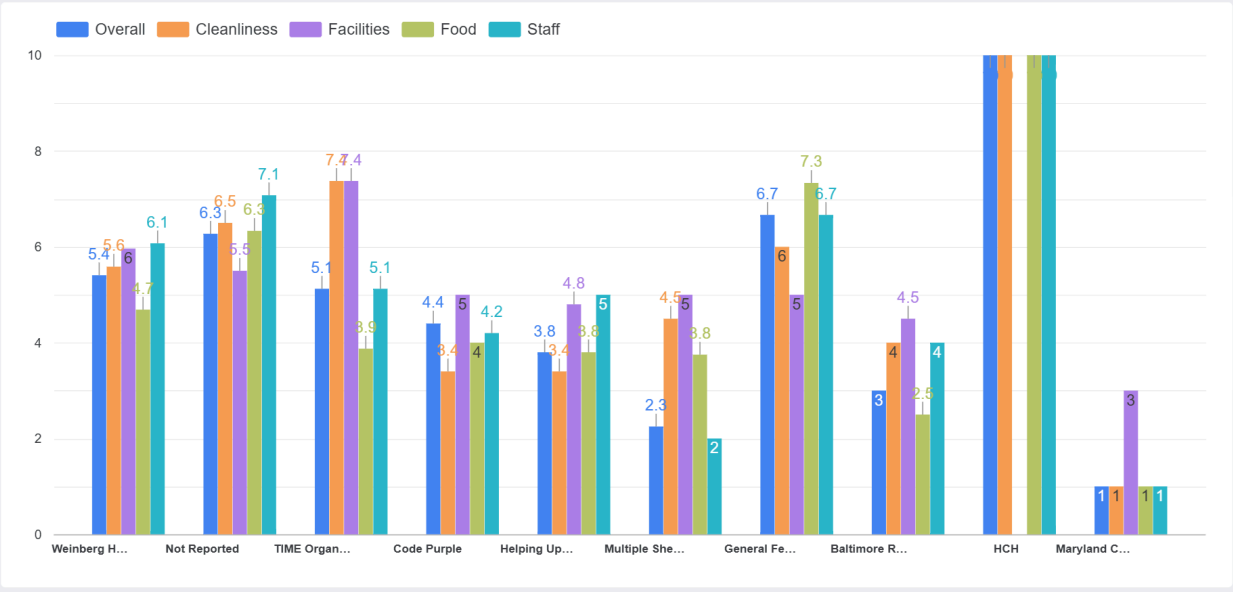
### Overall Awareness of Shelter Grievance Policy

45.95%

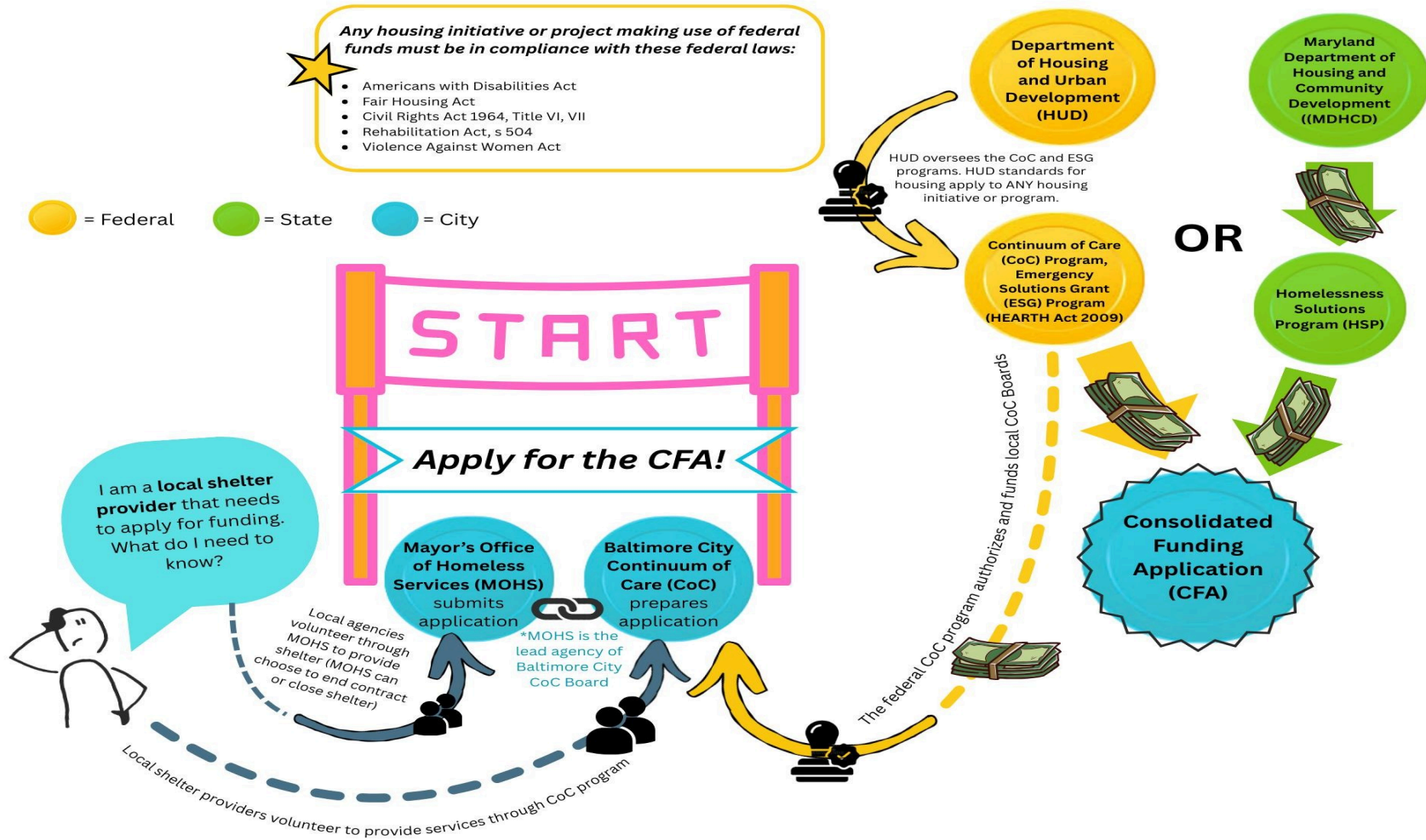
### Distribution of Grievance Rating by Awareness



### Average Ratings by Shelter



# How Baltimore City Shelters Get City Funds



# Funding Sources– Conditions Standards Policies and Realities

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Standards: HUD oversees and funds the Continuum of Care (CoC) program and the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program. Any COC or ESG grantees or subgrantees must be in compliance with HUD's minimum safety and sanitation standards. Additionally, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development requires that any emergency shelters to which it provides assistance must be in compliance with these minimum safety and sanitation standards. Shelters and programs that receive ESG funds are–

- Catholic Charities: Weinberg Housing and Resource Center
- Family and Children's Services of Central Maryland: SCS Youth Resource/Drop-In Center
- Healthcare for the Homeless: Convalescent Care Program
- Project PLASE: Temporary Housing for Vulnerable Adults
- St. Vincent dePaul: Beans and Bread, Sarah's Hope and FrontDoor
- TIME Organization: Men's Shelter and Women's Shelter

<u>Policy</u>	<u>Practice</u>
Shelter is structurally sound to protect residents from the elements.	
Is accessible in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Fair Housing Act, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.	
<u>Rehabilitation Act, Section 504:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibits discrimination solely on basis of disability in employment opportunities, enrollment in services, and receipt of benefits in federal programs</li> </ul>	
<u>Fair Housing Act:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibits discrimination by direct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals with wheelchairs or other mobility assistive devices can't</li> </ul>

<p>housing providers, as well as other agencies involved in housing (Ex: home insurers) solely on the basis of: race; religion; sex; national origin; family status; disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires that all newly constructed (1st occupancy after March 31 1991) multi-family dwellings (4 or more units) to have: accessible entrance on accessible route; accessible common and public use areas; doors wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair; accessible routes into and through each dwelling; accessible light switches, electrical outlets, and thermostats(ADA 2010 standards = 48 inches); reinforcement in bathroom walls for installation of grab bar; kitchens and bathrooms configured for usability and maneuverability for wheelchair users.</li> </ul>	<p>always navigate shelter halls, rooms</p>
<p><u>Americans with Disabilities Act, Title II:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and local governments must provide people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from all their programs, services, and activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Applies to government agencies and entities which contract with government or other entities to provide public services</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mandates equal treatment for individuals with disabilities; prohibits isolating or separating people with disabilities, or denying them the opportunity to participate in programs offered to others</li> <li>• Public entities (or contractors providing public services) cannot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals need to be in shelters to have access to a case manager; individuals need to stay consistently in the same shelter to maintain access to case manager</li> <li>• Individuals with diabetes may not have adequate space to store insulin – requires refrigeration</li> <li>• Individuals with medical devices (insulin pumps, oxygen tanks, mobility assistive devices) have been told that they have too many personal possessions and cannot bring all of them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Carolyn Johnson at PJC noted this as a complaint and said that the “reasonable accommodation” standard can be applied to rules</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>impose eligibility criteria with (tend to) screen out individuals with disabilities, unless criteria are necessary for provision of service, benefit, or activity offered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals with disabilities cannot be excluded from programs, services, or activities because buildings are inaccessible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Where structural changes can be made, should be made to make building accessible</li> <li>◦ Where structural changes cannot feasibly be made, programs and services can be provided at an alternate location, or in different manner</li> <li>◦ People with disabilities must have access to programs and services under the same conditions as others (Ex: privacy)</li> <li>◦ Entities not required to undertake 'undue burden'; undue burden determined by Department head or similarly high-ranking administrator with access to financial records</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>governing residents' possessions (medical devices, service/support animals and their necessities don't count towards total possessions)</p>
<p>Provides each resident with an acceptable place to sleep, and adequate space and security for themselves and their belongings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some rooms do not have locks on doors, or may not even have doors</li> <li>• Some people have reported that their belongings were stolen, or that someone (another resident or shelter staff) went through their belongings</li> <li>• Many people have reported harassment and abuse from shelter staff and other residents</li> <li>• Need for Secure Storage/Privacy ("would like a lock place to store</li> </ul>

	valuables"
Has rooms with ventilation and interior air that is free from pollutants at a level that could harm residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some folks have reported brown water in faucets, showers (see below)</li> </ul>
Has clean water, free of contamination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brown water in faucets</li> <li>Hot water problems</li> </ul>
Has sanitary facilities that are in proper operating condition and are private.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"showers not clean," "run out of toilet paper"</li> </ul>
Has working heating and cooling facilities.	
Has adequate lighting and ability for safe use of electrical appliances.	
If it has food preparation areas, those areas have suitable space and equipment to store, prepare, and serve food in a safe and sanitary way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moldy food (inadequate storage?)</li> <li>Cross contamination with allergens (unsuitable prep and/or storage)</li> <li>Raw/undercooked meat (inadequate prep)</li> <li>"months out of date," "not enough food," "forced salad," "bread &amp; soup"</li> <li>"Food is the worst, staff does not seem to care"</li> <li></li> </ul>
Is maintained in a sanitary condition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shelter linens and bedclothes can be dirty, unwashed, mildewy</li> <li>Problems with bedbugs</li> <li>Problems with cockroaches, mice, bed bugs and rats</li> <li>Bathrooms unclean, ran out of toilet paper, brown water in toilets and showers, hot water problems</li> </ul>

Has at least one working smoke detector in each occupied unit of the shelter, with smoke detectors located near sleeping areas where possible.	
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Homelessness Solutions Program, Habitability Standards: The Homelessness Solutions Program is a grant program run by the Maryland state government. HSP provides funding to Maryland Continuum of Care (Coc) boards and Local Homeless Coalitions. In principle, HSP grants are tied to minimum habitability standards, listed below, as well as Housing First principles. In practice, these standards are not consistently or reliably enforced, if they are enforced at all.

<u>Policy</u>	<u>In Practice</u>
Residents may have shared housekeeping duties only for the area in which they reside. Any other housekeeping duties must be performed voluntarily.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Westside Men's Shelter requires residents to sign up for chores during intake - responsible for keeping entire shelter clean, not just area in which they reside <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See language in Westside Mens' Shelter resident handbook</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Charging residents any fees is NOT allowed, including collection of public benefits such as SNAP. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents are not to be charged for shelter or programs</li> </ul>	
Shelter policy regarding client's personal possessions should be clearly explained at admission to shelter	
Providers should have <u>clear and fair</u> policies on how client belongings and personal information will be handled.	
Policies regarding clients' possessions and personal information should include guidance for clients on what happens to their belongings if they don't return to the	

shelter, as well as what constitutes abandonment of personal belongings or shelter space.	
Providers should make every effort to ensure policies regarding clients' possessions and personal information are followed compassionately.	

Housing First Principles: Housing First is an approach to addressing homelessness which emphasizes providing access to housing as a foundation for supportive services, rather than requiring clients to meet certain standards or graduate from certain programs. Maryland's Homelessness Solutions Program requires grantees and subgrantees to follow Housing First principles.

<u>Policy</u>	<u>In Practice</u>
No sobriety requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Westside Men's Shelter reserves right to conduct random Breathalyzer tests on reasonable suspicion of intoxication. If result indicates intoxicated blood level, resident may be asked to sleep it off, to leave shelter following day, or may be prohibited from using shelter vans/shuttle services</li> </ul>
No income requirements, or other policies which would make it difficult to enter a shelter	
NO searches and seizures by law enforcement without a warrant	
No mandatory drug testing	
Denial of service and/or termination of assistance ONLY when client behavior creates danger or threat of harm for shelter staff and other clients	

Regardless of source of funding, shelter residents report unsanitary and undignified conditions and treatment.

- **Lack of ADA accessibility and disability discrimination:** Elevators malfunction, individuals with diabetes not allowed access to adequate space to store insulin (requires refrigeration), hallways not wide enough for wheelchairs and walkers, individuals with medical devices told they have too many personal belongings and cannot bring all of them.
- **Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender and language spoken:** Haitian-Creole speaker turned away from shelter because he was a “liability”, racist treatment from staff
- **Negative Staff Attitudes:** “they don’t care,” “staff not kind,” “poor, redundant, inefficient”,
- **Cleanliness Issues:** “bed bugs,” “not clean,” “showers not clean,” “run out of toilet paper”, frequent reports of brown water in faucets, rats, mice, “Shelter linens and bedclothes can be dirty, unwashed, mildewy”
- **Problems with Food:** “months out of date,” “not enough food,” “forced salad,” “bread & soup”, cross contamination with allergens (unsuitable prep and/or storage), raw/undercooked meat (inadequate prep),
- **Feeling Unsafe or Unheard:** “can’t get help,” “people having trouble breathing,” “threats to any grievance,” “non-existent grievance process”
- **Need for Secure Storage/Privacy:** “would like a lock place to store valuables”, some rooms do not have locks on doors or may not even have doors, belongings were stolen, or that someone (another resident or shelter staff) went through their belongings, many people have reported harassment and abuse from shelter staff and other residents
- **Some Positive Staff Interactions:** “made sure I had something to eat,” “wanted to make sure I was ok”
- **Lack of AC:** Sarah’s Hope was without AC for a *whole month this summer!*

# Grievance Process

How can shelter residents submit grievances?

- Residents can report potential building code violations by submitting a [3-1-1 Service Request](#)
- Shelters receiving money from the City are required to have a Client Grievance Procedure. The Client Grievance Procedure provides a formal process for residents to submit a grievance when they have a concern about the level or quality of services provided.
  - This policy must be explained to clients at intake/admission
  - Staff are expected to be knowledgeable of policy, and copies of policy and forms must be available at all program locations
  - Part 1 of the form is completed by the client and submitted using the “secured grievance box” in the designated area of the program facility
  - Once you submit a grievance, here’s what should happen next:
    - Level 1: The form is reviewed by the program manager who then has 3 days to meet with the resident to discuss the situation. At the end of the meeting, the manager fills out their half of the form and tells the resident how they think the grievance can be resolved. The resident is asked to sign a form to indicate whether they agree or disagree.
    - Level 2: If the resident disagrees with the decision, the grievance goes to the Executive Director. The Executive Director then has 3 days to meet with the resident. At the end of the meeting, the Executive Director fills out their section of the form and tells the resident how they think the issue can be resolved. The resident is asked to sign a form to indicate whether they agree or disagree.
    - Level 3: If the resident disagrees again, the grievance goes to a MOHS representative, and they are expected to meet with the resident within 3 days. The MOHS representative fills out their section of the form and tells the resident how they think the grievance can be resolved. This is the final step, and the decision

is final. The resident is asked to sign a form and indicate if they agree or disagree.

54% of survey respondents said they had no knowledge of a grievance process at the shelter they stayed at. Shelter residents overall rated the grievance process at shelters 4.3 out of 10.