



THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

## **JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS**

December 18, 2020

The Honorable Bill Ferguson, Co-chair  
The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones, Co-chair  
Members of the Legislative Policy Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Joint Committee on Ending Homelessness is pleased to submit a summary report of its 2020 interim activities. This report also serves as the joint committee's annual report detailing its sixth year of activity. The joint committee met virtually three times this interim to receive briefings on State and local efforts to reduce evictions and foreclosures and to serve the State's homeless population, to hear updates from local advocates, and to explore topics such as the use of vacant commercial properties to house individuals who are experiencing or who may experience homelessness. The joint committee remains concerned about the increasing levels of homelessness and housing insecurity in the State, and the exacerbation of these issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. We need more data to understand this vulnerable population, including the geographic distribution and how this population interacts with State programs.

At the September 9, 2020 meeting, the joint committee heard from the Office of the Attorney General on federal and State actions to prevent evictions and foreclosures during the pandemic and the office's efforts to acquire civil legal aid and other funding to reduce evictions and foreclosures due to a loss of income because of COVID-19. The joint committee also heard from the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, the Washington County Community Action Council, and SHORE UP! Community Action Partnership on their work to reduce homelessness at the local level.

On October 7, 2020, the joint committee heard from representatives from the Lord Baltimore Hotel and the City of Baltimore about the isolation site they created to house those who tested positive for COVID-19 and would otherwise become homeless if they were unable to

shelter-in-place. The joint committee also heard from the Legislative Director of the Maryland Association of Counties on the results of a statewide survey regarding the use of hotels or other commercial spaces to provide housing assistance to the homeless or those who are at risk of homelessness. In addition, the joint committee heard from representatives from the Department of Human Services (DHS) on their efforts to prevent homelessness in foster care as a result of aging out of the system. Finally, the joint committee heard from several members of the homelessness advocacy community on their efforts to reduce homelessness in the State. For example, representatives from the United Way of Central Maryland discussed their Family Stability Program and the use of wraparound services to reduce homelessness. Another organization, the Women's Housing Coalition, discussed issues relating to the difficulty to rehouse homeless individuals due to federal requirements regarding who qualifies as homeless in addition to issues surrounding inspection requirements for housing units used to house homeless individuals.

The joint committee's meeting on November 4, 2020 further examined the adaptive reuse of large vacant commercial spaces for housing purposes. The National Conference of State Legislatures presented to the joint committee on initiatives in other states to use hotel rooms to house persons experiencing homelessness as well as a California bill to create incentives for rezoning retail areas to develop workforce housing. The joint committee also heard updates from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). DPSCS discussed its efforts to ensure access to housing and other services for reentering citizens as well as housing issues related to citizens under the supervision of the Division of Parole and Probation. DHCD presented on existing State and federal programs that could be used to support the adaptation of vacant commercial properties for housing purposes, updates on departmental efforts to address youth homelessness, and the disposition of funding the department received through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.

Based on witness testimonies and briefings given throughout the 2020 interim, the joint committee recommends that the General Assembly, State agencies, and all relevant stakeholders consider the following actions related to addressing the shortage of affordable housing as well as the needs of individuals who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness:

- continue to ensure that the Maryland Legal Services Corporation has adequate funding to provide legal services to families experiencing housing insecurity during the pandemic;
- collaborate with stakeholders to ensure resources related to rental assistance, eviction protections, and mortgage forbearance are widely publicized to those in need, both during and after the pandemic;
- level fund State rental housing and homelessness programs and seek new funding opportunities from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the State for rental assistance, legal services, case management services, and other supportive services;

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- recommend that DHS and DHCD evaluate case management best practices and make recommendations to the committee on how best to implement these practices into existing State programs that directly or indirectly work with persons experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness;
- create a workgroup to study policies and best practices to promote the adaptive reuse of large vacant commercial spaces;
- engage the State's federal delegation in seeking waivers from the HUD requirements for determining if an individual is "homeless," from requirements to verify immigration status as part of receiving housing assistance, and from certain inspection requirements for federally funded housing programs;
- examine options for rent relief or forgiveness for tenants whose landlords received mortgage forbearance during the pandemic;
- consider requiring certain State agencies to report to the joint committee on the housing status of individuals they serve; and
- require local detention centers and DPSCS to collect data and report on the housing status of offenders, including individuals who are preparing to reenter the community and individuals on parole and probation.

We wish to thank the joint committee members for their participation, representatives of public and private organizations who kept us informed, and our committee staff for their support.

Sincerely,



Mary L. Washington  
Senate Chair



Geraldine Valentino-Smith  
House Chair

MLW:GVS/HJC:TSE:ERH/kkh

cc: Members of the Joint Committee on Ending Homelessness  
Ms. Alexandra Hughes  
Mr. Jake Weissmann  
Ms. Victoria L. Gruber  
Mr. Ryan Bishop