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BILL NO: House Bill 1224
TITLE: Ending Youth Homelessness Act of 2018
COMMITTEE: Appropriations Committee
HEARING DATE: March 13, 2018
POSITION: SUPPORT

To the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

FreeState Justice advocates for the LGBTQ community across our state with a strong focus on youth issues and represents hundreds of LGBTQ clients each year. In Maryland, there are at least 2,425 “unaccompanied homeless youth,” or youth aged 24 and younger who are unstably housed or homeless and not with a parent or guardian, according to the 2017 Youth REACH count. There are youth experiencing homelessness in every county of our state. Up to 40 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ, and youth of color are also dramatically overrepresented.

Youth REACH Maryland has shown that the levels of youth homelessness that exist in Maryland is much higher than previously identified. While the official number identified is 2,425, the estimated count is much higher than that. With 40% of that count potentially being LGBTQ youth who are at an increased risk of harm simply because of their identity, it is imperative that work is done to assist those effected directly.

Homeless youth are at a higher risk of violence and exploitation and mental and physical health problems. These facts accompanied by the existing barriers to education and employment makes it much more difficult to overcome homelessness and become self-sufficient.

House Bill 1224 would establish a grant program at the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development to fund housing and supportive services for unaccompanied homeless youth. These funds would be direct assistance to homeless youth that need the help as soon as possible. We thank you for introducing this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Procopio

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