

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARC ELRICH ON BILL 25-20, RENTAL ASSISTANCE - AMENDMENTS

JULY 7, 2020

Good afternoon, Council President and Council Members,

I'm Amanda Harris, Chief, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness in the Department of Health and Human Services, here to testify on behalf of County Executive Elrich in support of Bill 25-20.

The County Executive requested Bill 25-20 in order to make a change to the County Code to conform to County Executive Order 135-19, which stated "no agent or department may condition the provision of County benefits, opportunities, or services on matters related to citizenship or immigration status unless required to do so by state or federal law, or court order." Bill 25-20 removes one reference to "undocumented resident" in a section of County Code related to DHHS' Rental Assistance Program. The other two proposed changes in the bill are not related to Executive Order 135-19 and are minor adjustments that are programmatic in nature.

The change to Section 41A-2 lowers the age of eligibility for the Rental Assistance Program from 62 to 55 years. The Rental Assistance Program has been identified as a key strategy to help the Continuum of Care end homelessness. In a 2017 gap analysis, a recommendation was made to expand the Rental Assistance Program to better serve individuals experiencing homelessness and at imminent risk of homelessness. The decision to lower the program eligibility age to 55 is based off the research that people experiencing homelessness have significant health issues and a life expectancy 30 years below that of the average American.

The change to Section 41A-5 removes the specific formula for calculating the amount of the Rental Assistance Program benefit and stipulates that the benefit amount be set in regulation annually- this change allows for easier updating of the benefit amount from year to year. In all, the changes to the eligibility criteria and moving the benefit amount to regulation leads to a more effective and efficient Rental Assistance Program. We ask for your favorable vote on Bill 25-20. Thank you.