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TO: The Honorable Thomas M. Middleton, Chair  
Members, Senate Finance Committee  
The Honorable Joanne C. Benson

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer  
J. Steven Wise  
Danna L. Kauffman

DATE: February 22, 2017

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 531 – *Housing Counselor and Aftercare Program*

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The Maryland State Medical Society, the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 531.

Achieving housing stability is a critical component of any multi-faceted effort to address the life challenges of those who live in poverty. Unemployment, chronic health conditions, lack of education, and access to adequate transportation are all factors that contribute to the inability of many of Maryland's most disadvantaged residents to become productive self-supporting individuals. However, without stable housing, efforts to address the other factors associated with poverty often prove to be ineffectual. As Maryland seeks to address the myriad of challenges faced by those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, the expansion of programs such as the Housing Counselor and Aftercare Program addressed in Senate Bill 531 will be essential to achieving the State's objectives.

Senate Bill 531 codifies the Housing Counselor and Aftercare Program in the Department of Human Resources and provides for mandatory funding in the budget beginning in Fiscal Year 2019. The program, established by regulation in 1985, but not codified is intended to assist families and individuals who are experiencing, or who are in imminent danger of, a housing crisis in obtaining and maintaining permanent housing. Eligible individuals and families must be receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) or in the process of applying for assistance. The program provides grant funds to local jurisdictions (currently Baltimore City, Baltimore, Harford, Montgomery and Washington Counties with expansion to Caroline County in 2016) to fund a housing counselor staff position, which is generally based within an emergency shelter program or local program of social services.

The housing counselors, in the counties where the program currently operates, and as proposed in the legislation, are to assist homeless individuals or families of those in imminent danger of homelessness to obtain and maintain permanent housing. Services include assisting the client with

searching for and obtaining permanent, affordable housing; advocating for clients with landlords, property managers, realty companies, and other sources of low-income housing; working with the clients' Department of Social Services case manager, when applicable, to coordinate services to the client; and assisting clients, as needed, with issues that contribute to chronic housing problems, including budgeting and household management.

Grant funds may also be used for client-related expenses such as rent, essential furnishings, credit checks, housing application fees and security deposits. However, given the limited amount of funding for the current program, grant funding has historically only been used to fund the housing counselor salary costs. Passage of Senate Bill 531 will not only codify the provisions of the program to ensure its permanency but will also provide additional funding that must be included in the budget each fiscal year starting with Fiscal Year 2019. The additional funding will not only enable expansion of the program to other jurisdictions but also provide funding for client related expenses authorized by the program that have not been provided due to funding shortfalls.

Passage of Senate Bill 531 provides an important enhancement of the current program and helps advance the State's objective of addressing housing instability and homelessness. The above-named organizations strongly urge a favorable report.

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