

Wilmington, Delaware
June 1, 2023

#0307

Sponsor:

**Council
Member
Darby**

WHEREAS, House Substitute No. 1 for House Bill No. 55 (HS No. 1 for HB No. 55), An Act to Amend Title 6 and Title 31 of the Delaware Code Relating to Individuals Who Are Homeless, proposes the establishment of a process by which complaints of discriminatory treatment will be addressed and conciliation provided. This legislation would be instrumental in ensuring that all individuals are able to be treated with dignity and have equal access to public services, regardless of housing status; and

WHEREAS, the homelessness population in the State of Delaware has dramatically risen, following the onset of the COVID pandemic in 2020. According to the Point in Time Count conducted by the Delaware Continuum of Care, the homeless population in Delaware has nearly doubled since 2020, when there were roughly 1,165 homeless individuals throughout the State. The 2022 PIT Count found that the statewide homeless population was roughly 2,369 individuals. These numbers include people sleeping in emergency shelters, transitional housing, State and nonprofit-funded motels and hotels, as well as people who are unsheltered. These numbers are conservative estimates, there are likely to be even more unhoused individuals throughout the State than the PIT Count was able to identify; and

WHEREAS, HS No. 1 for HB No. 55 reaffirms the rights of homeless persons to use and move freely in public spaces including public transportation, public parks and public buildings without discrimination. This legislation also prohibits a person from experiencing discrimination while seeking housing due to the lack of a permanent address, as well as reiterating the right of persons experiencing homelessness to receive medical and dental care, free from discrimination. The complaint procedure and system of enforcement established by

HS No. 1 for HB No. 55 reinforces that all Delawareans are valued members of this State, regardless of their housing status; and

WHEREAS, the shortage of rental housing and increasing lack of affordability places many more Delawareans at risk of becoming homeless. According to Housing Alliance Delaware's Annual Report, there are approximately 26,430 extremely low-income (ELI) households in Delaware, despite a shortage of approximately 18,148 affordable rental units statewide. This disparity between ELI households and affordable rental units is compounded by the tightening of the rental market due to the pandemic, resulting in fewer available units and an overall increase in the cost of rent; and

WHEREAS, according to data gathered by the Delaware Housing Authority in 2018, the housing wage in New Castle County to rent a two-bedroom apartment was \$23.29 per hour. While this wage has increased following the pandemic, if the current State minimum wage of \$11.75 per hour is considered, the average minimum wage earner would need to work approximately 80 hours per week or two full time jobs to afford a two-bedroom apartment of fair market rent in New Castle County. The New Castle County HOPE Center, the largest homeless shelter on the East Coast, houses approximately 400 people on any given day. Shelter demand is routinely greater than the beds available; and

WHEREAS, people experience the affects of homelessness for a variety of reasons including but not limited to, economic challenges, domestic violence, family issues, chronic health conditions, substance abuse, mental illness and a lack of affordable housing. One common element that unhoused individuals share is the challenges they face in preserving their sense of self, sense of community, and basic human dignity. HS No. 1 for HB No. 55 further strengthens the State of Delaware's policy to uphold the values of respect for all residents.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILMINGTON that the Wilmington City Council supports House Substitute No. 1 for House Bill No. 55 (HS No. 1 for HB No. 55), an Act to Amend Title 6 and Title 31 of the Delaware Code Relating to Individuals Who Are Homeless, which reinforces the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness to live free from discriminatory behavior and benefit from unrestricted access to public services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED this Council encourages the Delaware General Assembly to support this important provision, which furthers the goals of inclusiveness and respect for all Delawareans, regardless of their housing status.

Passed by City Council,

ATTEST: _____
City Clerk

SYNOPSIS: This Resolution expresses support for House Substitute No. 1 for House Bill No. 55 (HS No. 1 for HB No. 55), An Act to Amend Title 6 and Title 31 of the Delaware Code Relating to Individuals Who Are Homeless. HS No. 1 for HB No. 55 sets forth the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness and creates a process by which the State Human and Civil Rights Commission and the Division of Human Relations may accept and investigate complaints of discriminatory treatment, attempt conciliation, and refer enforcement actions to the Department of Justice where necessary. It is the position of the Wilmington City Council that HS No. 1 for HB No. 55 is necessary to ensure that all individuals, regardless of housing status, have equal opportunity to live in decent, safe, sanitary, and healthful accommodations and enjoy equality of opportunities.