BALTIMORE CITY ENCAMPMENT RESOLUTION PROTOCOL

Effective January 2024

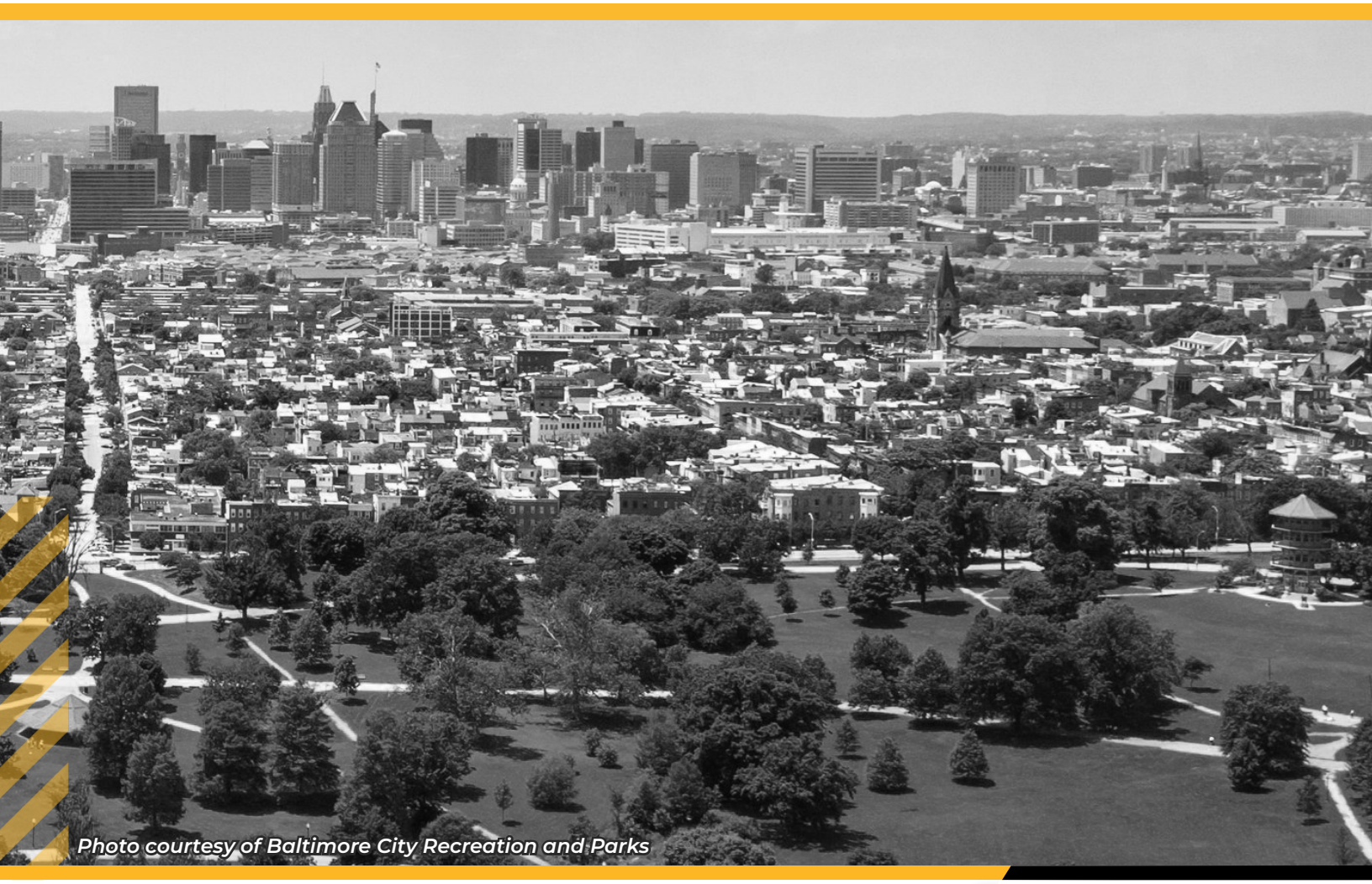


Photo courtesy of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks

MAYOR'S OFFICE OF HOMELESS SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities across the country, and in the City of Baltimore, are handling an unprecedented rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness with even greater visibility. While there is a demand for swift action, focusing on permanent and sustainable solutions is crucial.

"The approach must be trauma-informed and focus on rehousing encampment residents"

The Scott Administration understands the need to implement a trauma-informed and strategic approach to addressing encampments, with a focus on rehousing encampment residents. Research shows that approaches that criminalize homelessness and close encampments have been proven to be ineffective in decreasing overall homelessness [1]. Instead, these methods merely remove people experiencing homelessness from public view, further displaces people, and fails to thwart encampments from reemerging again in other areas or in places they previously existed.

Clean & Healthy Communities Pillar

Mayor Brandon M. Scott's Action Plan for Baltimore outlines five core pillars: Building Public Safety, Prioritizing Youth, Clean and Healthy Communities, Equitable Neighborhood Development, and Responsible Stewardship of City Resources. Mayor Scott recognizes the connection between neighborhood cleanliness and public health; the goals within the Clean and Healthy Communities pillar support the work to rehouse people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and clean encampment areas.

Photo of MOHS Director cleaning up trash during Mayor Scott's 2023 Fall Cleanup

[1] From a Criminal to a Human-Rights Issue: Re-Imagining Policy Solutions to Homelessness by Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice, August 2023

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidance that encouraged communities to allow encampments to stay intact as a way to mitigate the spread of the virus. Now, as our society is finding ways to address and mitigate COVID transmission, communities have reevaluated their approaches to encampment resolution. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), other agencies such as the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); Justice (DOJ); Veterans Affairs (VA); CDC; and several national partners recently established the *7 Principles for Addressing Encampments* [2]. This guidance serves as a blueprint for creating Baltimore City's Encampment Resolution Protocol.

7 Principles for Addressing Encampments

1. Establish a Cross-Agency, Multi-Sector Response
2. Engage Encampment Residents to Develop Solutions
3. Conduct Comprehensive and Coordinated Outreach
4. Address Basic Needs and Provide Storage for Personal Belongings
5. Ensure Access to Shelter or Housing Options
6. Develop Pathways to Permanent Housing and Supports
7. Create a Plan for What Will Happen to Encampment Sites After Closure

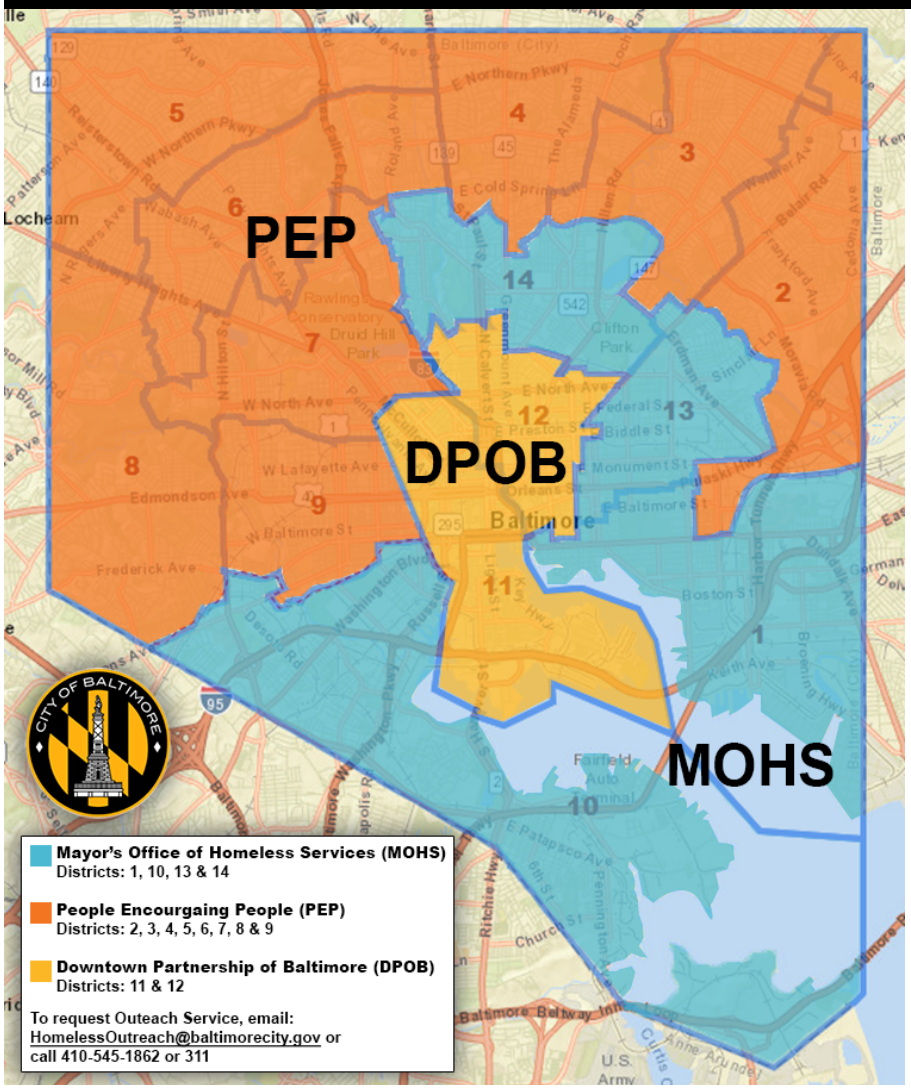
[2] 7 Principles for Addressing Encampments by U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, June 2022

CURRENT STATISTICS

The Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS), Downtown Partnership of Baltimore (DPOB), and People Encouraging People (PEP) work together to provide daily outreach to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in all 14 Baltimore City council districts. Approximately **25%** of current Outreach Team members have lived experience of homelessness, and proudly lent their expertise to the development of this protocol.

Photo of MOHS Outreach Workers in front of a Baltimore City outreach van

Homeless Services Street Outreach Map



As of January 2024, Outreach Teams track **27** known encampment sites across the City, a **40% decrease** from the number of encampment sites recorded in 2023. However, it should be noted that some encampment sites self-resolve and reappear over time, thus making their visibility less consistent than other sites.

The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandated assessment that provides a snapshot of homelessness in a community on a single night in January. During Baltimore's 2023 PIT Count, **113** people were counted as unsheltered.

Baltimore City 2023 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count

OVERALL FINDINGS

1,551

People counted as experiencing homelessness in Baltimore City on a single night in January 2023

65% Men

73% Black or African American

16% Chronically Homeless

8% Veterans

17% Youth (up to age 24)

58%
Emergency Shelter

34%
Transitional Housing

<7%
Unsheltered

*All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

The PIT Count is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) sole measure to count people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, however, it should not be considered a comprehensive view of homelessness.

The data collected in the PIT Count is included in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, which gauges the effectiveness of HUD's programs and informs policy decisions. Locally, the Continuum of Care (CoC) uses the data to address our local programs and policies, in addition to identifying the gaps in our current homeless response system.

PURPOSE

MOHS has developed an Encampment Resolution Protocol to provide overall guidance on a shared vision and approach that requires the coordination of multiple City agencies across all 14 council districts in Baltimore City. This protocol intends to prioritize households experiencing unsheltered homelessness; address the needs of the community; and outline the roles of City departments and community-based organizations who also serve our clients in resolving encampments.

The health and safety of all Baltimore residents is a top priority in the Scott Administration. Outdoor spaces are not intended to be used as dwellings and have been proven to lead to a number of health and safety issues including:

- **Increased health risks during extreme weather conditions.**
- **Potential fire hazards when cooking in close quarters or inside tents.**
- **Spread of illnesses and diseases due to improper handling of food and medicine, exacerbated by the absence of running water and electricity.**
- **Trash and other waste that attracts rodents and vermin.**

There is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to addressing encampments. Similar to the coordination of work occurring at the federal level, coordination at the local level is essential to ensure that the City is taking a proactive, yet humane approach to addressing encampments.

Baltimore City's Guiding Encampment Principles

Housing First – The primary goal is to connect individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness to permanent housing. If housing is unavailable, then shelter will be offered.

Client-Centered Approach – The well-being of individuals residing in encampments is at the forefront of the work, and solutions are tailored to meet their specific needs. Those individuals reserve the right to engage with outreach and choose to accept the solutions that are offered.

Trauma-Informed Care – Homelessness, and often the circumstances that cause homelessness, are traumatic experiences. Outreach Teams strive to foster trusting relationships with individuals residing in encampments and mitigate retraumatization by supporting essential needs and avoiding additional displacement.

Equity – In order to produce a homeless response system that works to end homelessness in Baltimore City, this policy and procedure seeks to:

1. Identify and address factors leading to the over-representation of people of color in the population of people experiencing homelessness,
2. Understand how facets of the homeless response system benefit or burden people of color and pinpoint opportunities to advance racial equity within the system,
3. Formulate key elements of a model homeless response system, including optimal types and quantities of housing units and service programs; and
4. Explore options to more effectively and equitably allocate resources, prioritize placement, and advance proactive, targeted strategies to prevent and end homelessness.

Access to Storage – A key component in the resolution process is to avoid the destruction of personal belongings when an encampment closes and provide storage for at least 30 days to allow individuals to collect their belongings. The fear of losing personal items and belongings can be a determining factor of whether a person chooses to transition into a shelter.

Multi-Agency and Cross-Sector Response – Ending homelessness requires the unique expertise and services of multiple city agencies and providers. Establishing a protocol that outlines responsibilities is essential to ensure City services appropriately respond to all residents, including people experiencing homelessness.

ENCAMPMENT IDENTIFICATION

An encampment is an outdoor location on public property where one or more individuals have established temporary living accommodations, typically involving structures like tents. It also refers to the accumulation of personal belongings that remain in place even when the individuals are not present.

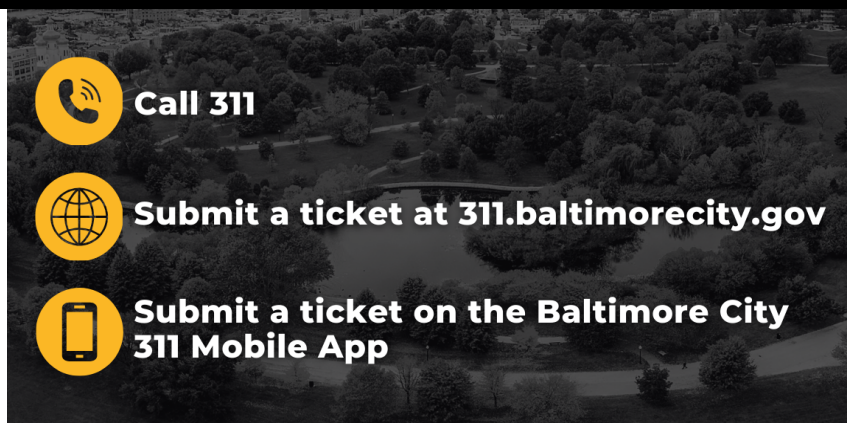
What an Encampment is Not:

- A dwelling set up on private property.
- A daytime gathering without temporary dwellings.
- Locations where an individual is temporarily asleep without setting up living quarters or taking belongings when they leave.
- Movable belongings like shopping carts or strollers.
- Places where panhandling occurs without temporary dwellings.
- A case of general trash left in a public space.

Encampments are often known to City-funded Outreach Teams as teams make regular visits to known gathering spots of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Daily outreach to individuals in encampments helps to build trust and meaningful relationships with encampment residents. Outreach Teams provide essential support services like meals, transportation, resource connections, and advocacy. They also help connect individuals to shelter, housing, and treatment programs.

Assistance for Unsheltered Neighbors

Constituents concerned about residents living in an encampment may report it to Baltimore City 311 Services. If Outreach is aware of an encampment site, that information may be shared with the reporting constituent. If Outreach is not aware of the site, a team will visit the location to conduct an assessment.



Moving encampments without a place for an unsheltered household to go will only cause further instability and trauma. It is essential to provide a range of shelters, housing options, and resources that meet the needs of an individual or family.

Encampment Resolution Overview

1

Once an encampment has been assessed, our Outreach Teams create a strategic plan to rehouse encampment residents.

Residents who opt in for rehousing are offered shelter, storage, and other services. Residents who choose to self-resolve are offered services and notified of the upcoming site cleanup.

2

The Encampment Workgroup uses the Encampment Resolution Assessment Tool which uses a four-point scale to evaluate and rank the prioritization of an encampment based on factors such as health and safety concerns, and extreme risks associated with changes in the environment.

Outreach Teams engage with the surrounding communities through community meetings and stakeholder conversations to answer questions, provide information, and receive feedback on encampment resolutions.

3

The combined information gathered from daily outreach and the Encampment Resolution Assessment Tool are then used to develop tailored timelines, ensuring that the most vulnerable individuals are served first.

Outreach Teams complete a By-Name List (BNL), a comprehensive list of individuals experiencing homelessness in a given community which is updated in real time, for each encampment site.

4

Outreach Teams provide ongoing engagement with the encampment site until the resolution and provide connections to vital resources, shelter, and housing.

Monitoring and necessary follow up at the resolved site will continue for approximately 90 days post cleanup. The process involves regular inspections, thorough assessments, and proactive measures in addressing challenges or issues that may arise during this critical period.

The resolution assessment, prioritization grid, intensive engagement, and post-resolution follow-up processes all ensure a comprehensive and effective strategy to manage encampments. **Our goal is to successfully engage each client 30 days prior to the resolution of any site by addressing immediate needs and providing long-term solutions.**

Notices are posted at least 10 business days in advance of a cleanup by the Baltimore Department of Transportation (DOT) or Department of Recreation & Parks (BCRP), depending on the location of the encampment. In some cases, the Department of Public Works (DPW) may perform "trash only" cleanups, allowing tents and personal belongings to stay while removing obvious trash that has been identified by encampment residents. A 14-day notice is provided for such cleanups.

Encampment Resolution Timeline

Encampment Located → Notify Appropriate Agencies → Coordinate Date for Resolution → Signage Placement → Outreach Engagement → Arrange Shelter → Resolution Timeline → Encampment Resolution

Encampment Located
- MOHS is notified of an encampment and assigns an Outreach Team to engage.
- MOHS documents the location, services offered, and number of individuals in the encampment.

Notify Appropriate Agencies
- MOHS connects with appropriate agencies for support based on individual occupant needs.
- Outreach Teams continue to engage and encourage service connections.

Coordinate Date for Resolution
- MOHS connects with appropriate City agencies to coordinate the encampment resolution date.
- Outreach Teams provide intensive engagement and encourage service connections for 30 days prior to the encampment resolution date.

Signage Placement
- DOT places signage at least 10 business days in advance of the encampment resolution to notify occupants of the date and time.
- Signage includes contact information for further assistance and resources.
- Outreach Teams complete a By-Name List (BNL) for the encampment site.

Outreach Engagement
- Outreach Teams identify the needs of each individual prior to the encampment resolution.
- Outreach Teams notify occupants of encampment rules and regulations as outlined by the City.
- Concentrated engagements continue throughout the 30-day process prior to final resolution.

Arrange Shelter Placement
- MOHS prioritizes shelter placement for individuals identified on the BNL.
- Outreach Teams continue to engage and encourage service connections.
- Outreach Teams verbally notify individuals of the signage placed by DOT.

Resolution Timeline
- City agencies and Outreach Teams meet to ensure a cohesive resolution timeline.
- Outreach Teams regularly visit the encampment site to further coordinate with occupants.

Encampment Resolution
- Shelter placement is offered and encouraged prior to the encampment resolution.
- Individuals may accept shelter or relocate prior to the arrival of DPW for cleanup.
- DPW and the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) arrive for encampment resolution.
- If individuals choose to accept shelter during or after the encampment resolution, MOHS will be notified and quickly coordinate the placement.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

The Encampment Resolution Protocol aims to address homelessness, while prioritizing households experiencing unsheltered homelessness, by implementing proactive and humane resolutions through outreach, engagement, and using the Housing First model.

The City of Baltimore remains committed to a client-centered, equitable, and collaborative approach in its efforts to end homelessness and is committed to ensuring we offer shelter or housing options to every client before resolving an encampment site.

Access to Safe and Stable Housing

- Increase individuals transitioning from unsheltered homelessness to stable housing.
- Improve coordination with housing partners and City agencies to provide timely housing options.
- Expand access to supportive services such as rental assistance, case management, and housing navigation.

Support and Stability for Individuals Living in Encampments

- Reduce the frequency and size of encampments by connecting individuals to affordable housing options.
- Provide trauma-informed outreach that builds trust with encampment residents, expands peer support networks, and connects residents to community resources.

Effective Engagement and Collaborative Solutions

- Provide comprehensive support services that will increase successful encampment resolutions through collaborative partnership and decision-making.
- Increase communication and transparency among encampment residents, participating City agencies, service providers, and community stakeholders.
- Promote alternative options for shelter, housing, or diversion based on the experiences of encampment residents to prevent further instability or trauma.

Participating Baltimore City Agencies

Agency	Role
Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS)	Lead coordination
Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD)	Conduct safety assessment
Baltimore Police Department (BPD)	Conduct safety assessment; if necessary, enforce encampment clearing; conduct on-going monitoring post-resolution
Baltimore City Recreation and Parks (BCRP)	If the encampment is located in a city park – produce and post signage; store personal belongings of encampment residents, as requested; clean up trash and abandoned items; conduct on-going monitoring post-resolution
Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD)	Conduct safety assessment (related to outbreaks and other public health concerns); make referrals to health-related services
Office of Emergency Management (OEM)	Assist in coordination, especially around inclement weather
Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)	Lead coordination effort on private property
Department of Public Works (DPW)	Clean up trash and abandoned items; manage biohazard concerns, when needed; conduct on-going monitoring post-resolution
Department of Transportation (DOT)	Print and post cleanup notification signage; transport personal belongings of encampment residents, as requested, to storage location; conduct on-going monitoring post-resolution
Mayor's Office of Community Affairs (MOCA)	Assist with community engagement in areas around the encampment site
Department of General Services (DGS)	Provide storage for personal belongings of encampment residents, as requested

“Encampments will not be closed unless an offer for shelter, housing, and other vital resources can be offered”

In accordance with Mayor Brandon M. Scott’s comprehensive Action Plan for Baltimore City, the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) presents a robust Encampment Resolution Protocol aimed at tackling the complex issue of unsheltered homelessness in our city. Emphasizing a trauma-informed approach, the protocol is centered on rehousing individuals in encampments and recognizing that punitive measures merely displace our residents without offering sustainable solutions. MOHS, in close collaboration with key partners, is steadfast in prioritizing households experiencing unsheltered homelessness which ensures a client-centered and equitable approach that promotes housing stability and long-term success.

This protocol aligns with guiding principles such as Housing First, a client-centered approach, trauma-informed care, equity, and access to storage, fostering a comprehensive, multi-agency response. It is crucial to highlight that encampments will not be closed without accompanying offers of housing, shelter, and vital resources, underscoring the significance of providing alternatives before taking any action. In addition, this protocol outlines a meticulous process of encampment identification, assessment, and prioritization, involving various City agencies to ensure fair and objective consideration.

The Encampment Resolution Protocol reflects Baltimore’s unwavering dedication to achieve a positive impact in the homeless services community and foster a city where homelessness is effectively addressed with compassion and strategic coordination.

Submit A Homeless Outreach Request

Baltimore City Outreach Teams

- Call 410-545-1862
- Email HomelessOutreach@baltimorecity.gov

Complete the Homeless Outreach Request Form

- Visit MOHS’ website

Baltimore City 311 Services

- Call 3-1-1
- Visit 311.baltimorecity.gov
- Submit a ticket on the Baltimore City 311 Mobile App