

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: Appropriations Committee
From: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Executive Director
Re: HB 559, Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Funding
Date: February 18, 2020
Position: Support

Advocates for Children and Youth supports HB 559, which increases the appropriation for the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program by requiring the Governor to provide funds in the budget to ensure that the value of TCA, combined with federal food stamps, reaches 71% of the State Minimum Living level by FY 2026.

In 2018, 164,213 children in Maryland were living in poverty. Nearly 49% of those children, or 80,334 individuals, were African American or Black. Another 22%, or 36,379 children, were White. 78,000 children in Maryland were living in extreme poverty, or 50% of the poverty line. This includes 10%, of African American or Black children, or 41,000 individuals, and 3% of White children, or 17,000 individuals. These numbers show the disproportionate impact of poverty on Maryland's children, and the critical need of expanding our TCA to ensure that children of every race have the same opportunity to succeed.

Currently, the Temporary Cash Assistance program – when combined with federal SNAP benefits – only equals 61% of the Maryland Minimum Living Level (MLL). An increase in the TCA benefit is long overdue – the program has been at 61% of the MLL since Welfare Reform in 1996. Families use TCA benefits to purchase housing, food, transportation, and other basic needs. As the cost of living continues to rise, families on TCA are left with few options on how to even attempt to make ends meet at the current benefit levels.

The TCA program exists to support those experiencing deep poverty and help them build economic security. In Maryland, the number of children living in deep poverty (50% of the poverty line) has increased over the last 10 years, from 66,457 children in 2009 to 79,101 in 2018. If the goal of TCA is to help families have greater financial stability, the program clearly needs adjustment to reach its goals.

Raising the value of TCA to reach 71% of the State MLL will provide greater stability to children living in households that are experiencing deep poverty. HB 559 will help ensure more children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential, and we urge the committee to issue a favorable report.

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Advocates for Children and Youth builds a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children and families of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth achieve their full potential.