

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: Appropriations Committee
From: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Executive Director
Re: HB1313, Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Eligibility
Date: March 3, 2020
Position: Support

Advocates for Children and Youth supports HB 1313, which eliminates full-family sanctions in the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program. The bill would ensure that children still receive their 75% share of TCA while allowing a portion of the remaining 25% that is the adult's share to be withheld.

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. 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. These numbers show the disproportionate impact of poverty on Maryland's children, and reinforce the critical need of fixing the TCA program.

Currently, full-family TCA sanctions are far too common, and are increasing. A TCA sanction is a suspension of a TCA grant when an adult does not meet certain participation requirements. Maryland imposes immediate full-family sanctions, meaning families lose their entire benefit, for up to 30 days, when an adult is sanctioned. Sanctions occur at alarmingly high rates and can be imposed erroneously and inconsistently for minor violations. Since 1997, sanctions have increased more than 500%.

When low-income families lose their full benefits due to sanctions, they face immediate hardships such as inability to pay rent, bills, access transportation for school and work, and meet their household basic needs. For families receiving TCA these sanctions can be crippling. Moreover, a study from the University of Maryland School of Social Work found the families most commonly sanctioned in Maryland face significantly more barriers than their peers: limited education, limited transportation access, living in areas of concentrated poverty, and have few job options.¹

HB 1313 establishes a portion of the TCA grant – 75% - as a child benefit, which belongs to the child(ren) and cannot be sanctioned or reduced. As over 70% of TCA recipients in Maryland are children, this is a critically important shift. HB 1313 strikes an appropriate, humane balance between signaling to the adult participant that they have fallen out of compliance with TCA, while preserving household income so the family doesn't fall further into deep poverty, and we urge the committee to issue a favorable report.

¹ University of Maryland School of Social Work. (2016). *Are Welfare Recipients with the Most Severe Work Sanctions Particularly Disadvantaged?* <https://familywelfare.umaryland.edu/reports1/sanctionscharacteristics.pdf>