



# Welfare Advocates

Founded 1979

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## Senate Bill 787 Family Investment Administration – Temporary Cash Assistance – Eligibility

Senate Finance Committee  
March 6, 2020

### Support

Welfare Advocates is a statewide coalition of social service organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and community members, whose mission it is to educate ourselves, and the wider community and to advocate for an adequate safety net and public policies that support families moving towards economic stability.

**Welfare Advocates strongly supports SB 787**, which eliminates full-family sanctions in the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program and establishes 75% of the TCA grant as the child's portion that cannot be sanctioned, and allows 30% of the remaining adult portion to be sanctioned for TCA work participation sanctions. Additionally, SB 787 prohibits the Department of Human Services from reducing or terminating TCA recipients for noncompliance with work activity requirements if individuals have good cause as outlined in the bill.

**The Temporary Cash Assistance program serves families with children who live in deep poverty.** Temporary Cash Assistance, the cash assistance part of Maryland's TANF program, was created as part of Welfare Reform in the mid-nineties. Today, over 17,000 of Maryland's families have to rely on TCA to meet their basic needs, and more than 74% of TCA recipients are children. The benefit level for this program has kept pace with inflation, but is statutorily set so that the combined total of the TCA benefit and the Food Supplement Program benefit only equals 61% of the minimum living level.

**While TCA strives to move low-income Marylanders into the workforce, far too many families spiral further into deep poverty due to draconian sanctioning policies.** The federal government requires states to sanction recipients when they don't meet work participation requirements; however, states have large discretion with how and when to sanction. Unfortunately, TCA sanctions occur at alarmingly high rates, and can be imposed erroneously and inconsistently for minor violations.<sup>i</sup> Maryland imposes immediate full-family sanctions, meaning families lose their entire benefit -for up to 30 days- when an adult is sanctioned. When low-income families lose their full benefits due to sanctions, they face immediate hardships such as inability to pay rent, bills, access transportation, and meet their household basic needs.

**Full-family sanctions eliminate a family's household income, which exponentially harms the children living in the household.** Families with children often seek cash assistance when there is a change in their circumstances, such as a job loss, domestic violence, eviction, or serious medical issues. TCA is a vital bridge for low-income families to build stability, and the cash income from TCA helps to ameliorate some of the negative effects of poverty on children. Regrettably, when that income is removed from the household due to a sanction, studies show this has a dramatically negative impact on children. Children in sanctioned households are more likely to experience food insecurity, experience hospitalization for illness, be absent from school, and to engage in survival activities such as panhandling and theft.<sup>ii</sup> **Full-family TCA sanctions do not follow the two-generation model, but rather exacerbate Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the household.**

**SB 787 rectifies Maryland's TCA sanctioning policies, and creates in statute good cause exemptions from work activity requirements.** SB 787 establishes a portion of the TCA grant – 75% - as a child benefit, which belongs to the child(ren)

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and cannot be sanctioned or reduced. If and when it is necessary to sanction the adult caregiver, the remaining 25% of the TCA grant is considered the adult portion and can be subject to sanction. For work sanctions, this bill would sanction 30% of the adult portion of TCA. Additionally, as a study from the University of Maryland School of Social Work shows, 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.<sup>iii</sup> Therefore, SB 787 also outlines reasons for good cause exemptions to the work participation requirements, such as eviction, homelessness, transportation and child care challenges. Taken together, SB 787 strikes a balance between alerting an adult caregiver when they have fallen out of compliance with TCA, while preserving household income so the family doesn't fall further into deep poverty.

**For the reasons stated above, we respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 787.**

Submitted by Lisa Klingenmaier

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<sup>i</sup> University of Maryland School of Social Work. (2016). *An Overview of Work Sanctions in Maryland*.

<https://familywelfare.umaryland.edu/reports1/worksanctionsbrief2016.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Children's Health Watch. (2002). *The Impact of Welfare Sanctions on the Health of Infants and Toddlers*.

<https://childrenshealthwatch.org/the-impact-of-welfare-sanctions-on-the-health-of-infants-and-toddlers/>

<sup>iii</sup> 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>

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