

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

BILL NO: House Bill 562
TITLE: Human Services – Temporary Cash Assistance – Housing Allowance
COMMITTEE: Appropriations
HEARING DATE: February 28, 2023
POSITION: FAVORABLE

House Bill 562 would require local social service departments to provide a housing allowance for low-income families with children who receive Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) or Transitional Support Services (TSS). The Human Trafficking Prevention Project (HTPP), which provides direct representation to survivors of human trafficking and those populations put at highest risk of exploitation, supports this bill because it will allow Maryland families experiencing poverty to access and maintain housing stability, which prevents human trafficking.

Maryland is the ninth most unaffordable state to live in, with approximately 30-39% of households in Maryland struggling to provide for their basic needs, including housing.¹ This poses a problem for many Marylanders, but especially families whose primary source of income is Temporary Cash Assistance.² In many cities in Maryland, TCA does not come close to covering rent at fair market value for families who receive these benefits.³ This means families receiving TCA are still experiencing housing instability and homelessness under the current system.

This issue is particularly relevant to the HTPP's work, as housing instability and homelessness are a common predictor *and* outcome of the crime of human trafficking.⁴ Traffickers prey on vulnerable populations, particularly those facing homelessness and housing instability, as emergency and short-term housing options are limited, and survivors are commonly left unhoused once their shelter options run out.⁵ As victims struggle to meet

¹ National Low-Income Housing Coalition, *Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing 22* (2022), <https://nlihc.org/oor>; see also, United For ALICE, *ALICE Report: A Study of Financial Hardship in Maryland*, United Way of Central Maryland, <https://www.uwcm.org/alice> (last visited Feb. 22, 2023) (.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.* (highlighting that Fair Market Rent for a 2 bedroom in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Anne Arundel is \$1,548 a month, while rent in Prince George's and Montgomery County is \$1,838 a month. The maximum TCA benefit for a household of three people is \$727).

⁴ See generally Danielle Richards, *The Intersection between Housing Instability and Human Trafficking*, United Ways Blog (Apr. 2022), <https://www.unitedway.org/blog/the-intersection-between-housing-instability-and-human-trafficking#> (citing data from Covenant House, a country-wide organization providing shelter and supportive services to youth experiencing homelessness, that found that 68% of the youth they serve had traded sex because they had no safe or consistent place to stay); Brittany Anthony et al., *On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking*, Polaris Project, 16 (Jul. 2018), <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Roadmap-for-Systems-and-Industries-to-Prevent-and-Disrupt-Human-Trafficking-Housing-and-Homelessness-Systems.pdf> (citing a survivor survey where 64% of survivor respondents reported being homeless or experiencing unstable housing when they were recruited by a trafficker).

⁵ Richards, *supra* note 3 (Traffickers are known to prey on the vulnerabilities of individuals that are experiencing poverty and homelessness); Polaris Project, *Analysis of 2020 National Human Trafficking Hotline Data*, Polaris Project Blog, <https://polarisproject.org/2020-us-national-human-trafficking-hotline-statistics/> (last visited Feb. 19, 2022) (citing that unstable housing is one of the primary risks for both sex and labor trafficking).

their basic needs, traffickers often exploit this vulnerability by offering shelter and food.⁶ When victims then try to escape their traffickers, the threat of homelessness is held against them to maintain control.⁷ Providing housing assistance to low-income families has been shown to have a direct effect on decreasing housing instability and homelessness,⁸ which, in turn lessens these individuals' vulnerability to human trafficking.⁹

By offering a housing allowance to families with children that already receive TCA or TSS, HB 562 will allow low-income families to better access housing when needed and better maintain that stability once safely housed. In doing so, this will also reduce the pool of vulnerable people that traffickers so often prey upon. For these reasons, the Human Trafficking Prevention Project supports House Bill 562, and respectfully urges a favorable report.

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⁶ Anthony et al., *supra* note 4 at 18-19 (noting that traffickers coerce victims by misrepresenting a living arrangement with the potential victim, offering private living conditions, free foods or illicit substances).

⁷ Anthony et al., *supra* note 4 at 16.

⁸ See generally Will Fischer et al., *Research Shows Rental Assistance Reduces Hardship and Provides Platforms to Expand Opportunities for Low-Income Families*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Dec. 2019), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/research-shows-rental-assistance-reduces-hardship-and-provides-platform-to-expand> (highlighting that, in addition to decreasing homelessness, direct provision of rental assistance reduces poverty, improves outcomes for both children and adults, and reduces overall health costs), .

⁹ See generally Richards, *supra* note 4.