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Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB160 HUMAN SERVICES – TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE – CALCULATION OF BENEFITS

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is the federal program that allows states to administer cash assistance programs with some flexibility. Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) is Maryland's cash assistance TANF program and is a key social safety net program that helps households at or below the poverty line. The majority of TCA beneficiaries are families with children who use these benefits to help cover the costs of basic needs like food, transportation, and clothing. Due to their very low incomes, many TCA recipients also qualify for housing assistance, such as a Housing Choice voucher, public housing, or rental assistance.

Unfortunately, Maryland is one of only a handful of states that reduces cash benefits if a family also receives any form of housing assistance. Under Maryland TCA regulations, public housing subsidies are counted as unearned income for purposes of TCA benefits. Because of this, TCA recipients who either (1) reside in public housing, (2) receive a Housing Choice voucher, or (3) receive rental assistance **lose out** on TCA benefits. SB 160 would disregard the housing assistance that a family in deep poverty receives and allow a family to receive an additional \$60 per month that they would otherwise qualify for under TCA.

None of our neighboring states (VA, DE, PA, and WV) treat housing subsidies as income for TANF purposes. As a result, individuals in these states receive the maximum allowed assistance, which in turn removes some financial burden and makes economic stability more attainable. It's time for Maryland to join our neighbors and prioritize equity.

Research shows that social safety net programs like TCA improve health outcomes and health equity, reduce health care costs, and increase children's educational attainment and economic mobility. Providing housing subsidies to low-income families does not reduce their existing need for cash assistance. In fact, the need for housing subsidies among TCA participants speaks to the need for policymakers to provide **full** financial assistance to support the essential needs of Maryland families. Our investment in safety net programs is an investment in Maryland children and the fight against poverty.

I urge a favorable report on SB160.