



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
SB482: Governor's Office for Children - Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions,
Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024)

March 1, 2024

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

TO: The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair; The Honorable Cheryl Kagan, Vice Chair; and
Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
FROM: Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board (CAB), the County's local, state, and federally designated anti-poverty group, is in support of SB482, the ENOUGH Act of 2024, with a proposed amendment.

Child poverty continues to be a widespread concern in Maryland, including in Montgomery County. Twenty-nine Census tracts in the County have a child poverty rate of 20% or higher.¹ The ENOUGH Act's establishment of grants for programs working to reduce child poverty could greatly benefit numerous nonprofit and public agencies here in Montgomery County and across the state.

It is important to note that although The ENOUGH Act focuses on child poverty, the very high cost of living in areas like Montgomery County means that many children in households above the Federal Poverty Level are still struggling. The 2023 Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard, which provides a more accurate measure of the true cost of living, notes that a family of three with one adult, one preschooler, and one school-age child would need an annual income of \$116,864 to cover their basic expenses - over four and half times the Federal Poverty Level.²

Nationwide, Community Action has been a leader in addressing poverty for nearly 60 years and for over 55 years here in Montgomery County. Our own agency has several programs that aim to reduce child poverty. The agency's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program completed over 1,900 tax returns for lower-income County households last year, reducing child

¹ <https://data.census.gov/>

² https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/MDMontCo2023_SSS.pdf

poverty by connecting clients with \$2,375,603 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$757,849 in Child Tax Credits.

The TESS Community Action Center continues its 50+ year legacy of connecting residents to essential services using culturally and linguistically specific service delivery. Every month, TESS, along with the agency's new Navigation team, addresses the needs of hundreds of clients, the vast majority of whom are families with children, connecting residents with SNAP, healthcare, housing assistance, child care assistance, and numerous other critical services.

As our board serves as the governing body for Head Start, along with the Head Start Parent Policy Council, we are consistently engaged in providing direct services for eligible children and families. The Montgomery County Head Start Program has addressed the root causes of generational poverty for over 55 years by providing access to education for children and their parents, as well as health and nutrition services, parent involvement opportunities, and access to community resources such as housing, employment, food and social services. With current funding, Head Start/PreK programs serve 3,183 children in lower-income households, but many more children in our community are income-eligible for these programs and remain unserved.

Given Community Action's extensive experience working to reduce poverty in Maryland and across the country, we recommend an amendment to the legislation. **We propose that 50% of the funding allocated for the ENOUGH Act be made available exclusively to Community Action Agencies, as identified by the Maryland Community Action Partnership (MCAP).** These agencies have a proven track record of effectively addressing community needs and are well-positioned to implement the objectives outlined in the bill. We believe that this amendment will enhance the impact of the ENOUGH Act by leveraging the expertise and existing infrastructure of Community Action Agencies, ultimately contributing to a more targeted and efficient implementation of the program.

The Montgomery County Community Action Board strongly supports SB482 with the proposed amendment and asks the Committee for its support.