

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 1181 (Delegate Rosenberg)
 Health and Government Operations

Family Investment Program - Couples Advancing Together Program

This bill requires the Secretary of Human Services, in cooperation with directors of local departments of social services, to establish the Couples Advancing Together (CAT) Program in the Department of Human Services (DHS). The program’s purpose is to assist couples and parents that qualify as a family eligible for the Family Investment Program (FIP) to move toward stable relationships and family-friendly employment, for one or both parents of a child who resides with the family, in order to improve their economic circumstances and provide support for lasting family units. The program must be established in at least one county. It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Governor include \$650,000 for the CAT program in the annual State budget for fiscal 2021 through 2025. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$134,800 in FY 2020 to implement the CAT program. Future years reflect increased funding consistent with the legislative intent expressed in the bill. Potential increase in federal fund revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
FF Revenue	-	-	-	-	-
GF Expenditure	\$134,800	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000
Net Effect	(\$134,800)	(\$650,000)	(\$650,000)	(\$650,000)	(\$650,000)

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: In addition to existing requirements regarding FIP recipients, the CAT program must include:

- implementation of policies and procedures in the local department that encourage (1) increased participation of fathers at the beginning of the process for determining the eligibility of a family or custodial parent for FIP benefits, including temporary cash assistance, unless DHS has reason to believe the father has a history of domestic violence; and (2) the creation and expansion of services and opportunities to address the needs of children and parents together;
- development of a local department referral process or integrated partnerships with other local or State agencies through which parents, and couples jointly, may access programs and services that target economic stability, healthy relationships, and parenting; and
- implementation of the program requirements specified below.

The program must provide participants with education on, and the tools needed for, achieving success at home, in the workplace, and in society through an eight-week participation period and case management for up to two years immediately following the participation period.

With the assistance of the Center for Urban Families and other subject matter experts identified by the Secretary and local directors, participants must (1) develop skills to enhance healthy relationships and parenting; (2) develop a written family-focused career plan; (3) learn skills that are required to compete in the job market; and (4) attend group sessions, as specified. To be eligible to participate in the program, a couple must be raising together a child younger than age 14.

In addition to any other available funds, the Secretary must attempt to access funds from specified sources. The Secretary must report annually to the Senate Finance Committee and the House Appropriations Committee on the effectiveness of the program, including the number of couples and individual parents participating in the program and factors that affect program participation.

By December 1, 2019, DHS, in consultation with the Center for Urban Families and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, must report to the General Assembly on (1) any current practices and procedures of the Family Investment Administration (FIA), local departments of social services, the Child Support Administration (CSA), and any other local or State policy, whether authorized by statute, regulation, or practice, that may adversely impact or impede the progress of parents who qualify for FIA services and benefits; and (2) recommendations of best practices for, and policy changes to be made to,

FIA, CSA, and any other local or State body that will enable couples striving to navigate social service systems, as specified.

Current Law: Chapter 367 of 2013 established the Couples Advancing Together Pilot Program, which terminated June 30, 2016. The purpose of the program was to assist couples that qualify as a family eligible for FIP to move toward stable relationships and family-friendly employment, for one or both parents of a child who resides with the family, in order to improve their economic circumstances and provide support for lasting family units. To be eligible for the program, a couple must have been raising together a child younger than age 14. Among other components, the pilot program included a six-week participation period during which couples received education on and were provided with the tools needed for achieving success at home, in the workplace, and in society.

FIP within local departments of social services has the primary purpose of supporting family efforts to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency through services and financial aid geared to individual family needs. FIP for a recipient must include supportive services activities, appropriate referrals to family planning counseling and services, and temporary cash assistance, as a last resort. A recipient must also agree to cooperate with child support enforcement efforts and to comply with reasonable requests for cooperation by case management workers in seeking and using available programs and community and family resources. The agreement must also specify the necessary support services that the local department will assist in providing and specify the work activities in which the recipient will participate.

State Fiscal Effect: The Department of Human Services did not respond to a request regarding the fiscal impact of this bill.

Based on available information regarding the prior Couples Advancing Together Pilot Program, it is assumed that a program can be implemented in at least one county for approximately \$134,831 annually. This estimate assumes that 50 couples participate in the program, and that contractual services to provide the required education, training, and materials per couple are \$1,400. The estimate also assumes that an additional caseworker is hired to provide specialized case management for program participants.

This fiscal and policy note also assumes that, beginning in fiscal 2021, the Governor includes \$650,000 in the annual State budget consistent with the intent expressed within the bill. With that level of funding, the pilot program can be significantly expanded to include other jurisdictions and/or additional participants. Although for purposes of this fiscal and policy note it is assumed that general funds are required, to the extent that DHS

is able to leverage federal funds to support the program, the need for general funds may be reduced or eliminated entirely.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery County; Governor's Office; Department of Budget and Management; Department of Legislative Services

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