

# HOUSE BILL 786

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By: **Delegate Kaiser**

Introduced and read first time: January 29, 2021

Assigned to: Appropriations

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## A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Department of Human Services, Maryland Department of Health, and**  
3 **Department of Education – Easing Access to Family Support Programs**

4 FOR the purpose of establishing that it is the policy of the State to do everything possible  
5 to alleviate administrative hurdles for low-income families seeking access to support  
6 programs; requiring the Department of Human Services, the Maryland Department  
7 of Health, and the State Department of Education to take certain steps to achieve  
8 the policy goal; requiring the Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of Health,  
9 and the State Superintendent to work in concert to simplify the application process  
10 for family support programs on or before a certain date; requiring the Secretary of  
11 Health, the Secretary of Human Services, and the State Superintendent to explore,  
12 and when possible, take certain actions to simplify certain application processes;  
13 requiring the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of Human Services, and the State  
14 Superintendent and all relevant departmental staff to meet at least a certain number  
15 of times between certain dates for a certain purpose; requiring the Secretary of  
16 Health, the Secretary of Human Services, and the State Superintendent to adopt  
17 certain regulations and alter certain policies and guidelines and seek certain waivers  
18 from federal entities in order to take certain actions specified in this Act; requiring  
19 the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of Human Services, and the State  
20 Superintendent to evaluate whether certain legislative changes are needed;  
21 requiring the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of Human Services, and the State  
22 Superintendent to issue a certain report to the Governor and the General Assembly  
23 on or before a certain date; defining a certain term; and generally relating to easing  
24 access to family support programs.

25 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
26 That:

27 (a) In this section, “family support programs” means the programs described  
28 under subsection (c) of this section.

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 (b) (1) It is the policy of the State that everything possible be done to alleviate  
2 any administrative hurdles that stand in the way of low-income families seeking to access  
3 support programs.

4 (2) In order to achieve the policy goals of the State, the Department of  
5 Human Services, the Maryland Department of Health, and the State Department of  
6 Education shall, at a minimum, take the steps prescribed in this Act.

7 (c) On or before July 1, 2022, the Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of  
8 Health, and the State Superintendent shall work in concert to simplify the application  
9 processes for:

10 (1) public assistance programs provided by the Department of Human  
11 Services under Title 5 of the Human Services Article;

12 (2) the Maryland Medical Assistance Program;

13 (3) the Maryland Children's Health Program;

14 (4) the subsidized and free feeding programs established under Title 7,  
15 Subtitle 6 of the Education Article;

16 (5) the breakfast programs established under Title 7, Subtitle 7 of the  
17 Education Article;

18 (6) child care programs provided by the Division of Early Childhood  
19 Development under Title 9.5, Subtitle 9 of the Education Article; and

20 (7) any other programs administered by the Department of Human  
21 Services, the Maryland Department of Health, or the State Department of Education that  
22 serve similar populations to those listed in items (1) through (4) of this subsection.

23 (d) In order to achieve the simplification required under subsection (b) of this  
24 section, the Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of Health, and the State  
25 Superintendent, shall explore and, when possible, take action on:

26 (1) steps that can be taken to simplify the application process for each of  
27 the family support programs, including steps to:

28 (i) simplify application language;

29 (ii) reduce the number of application questions to the fewest  
30 necessary to determine qualifications;

31 (iii) improve access to applications through prominent placement on  
32 departmental websites; and

1 (iv) provide ready access to physical application forms at points at  
2 which State personnel working in the fields of human services, health, and education have  
3 contact with potentially qualifying individuals and families;

4 (2) the possibility of creating a single, universal application for all family  
5 support programs;

6 (3) the possibility of establishing a universal verification process that can  
7 be used by each of the family support programs;

8 (4) automatically enrolling an individual or family who qualifies for one  
9 family support program in all other family support programs for which the individual or  
10 family qualifies;

11 (5) aligning family support program recertification dates;

12 (6) establishing cross-departmental review of new programs, or changes in  
13 program focus, to ensure that all family support programs are aligned toward the same  
14 aims and do not create counter-pressures on program recipients; and

15 (7) the possibility of sharing electronic data among different programs and  
16 across different departments and agencies in order to accomplish items (1) through (6) of  
17 this subsection.

18 (e) In order to take the actions described under subsection (d) of this section, the  
19 Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of Health, and the State Superintendent, and  
20 all relevant departmental staff shall meet at least once per quarter between July 1, 2021,  
21 and June 30, 2022.

22 (f) (1) In fulfilling their duties under this section, the Secretary of Human  
23 Services, the Secretary of Health, and the State Superintendent shall adopt all necessary  
24 regulations and alter all policies and guidelines in order to do all within their legal  
25 authority to take the actions described under subsection (d) of this section.

26 (2) If the Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of Health, or the  
27 Secretary of Education determines that taking an action described under subsection (d) of  
28 this section requires a waiver from a federal entity, the Secretary shall seek the waiver in  
29 order to take the action at the earliest possible opportunity.

30 (3) The Secretary of Human Services, the Secretary of Health, and the  
31 State Superintendent shall evaluate whether any legislative changes are necessary to take  
32 any actions described under subsection (d) of this section.

33 (g) (1) On or before January 1, 2023, the Secretary of Human Services, the  
34 Secretary of Health, and the State Superintendent shall jointly report to the Governor and,  
35 in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly on the  
36 progress made toward achieving the goals listed in this Act.

1                   (2)     The joint report shall include specific areas where legislative changes  
2 are necessary, if any have been found, along with recommended new legislative language.

3                   SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July  
4 1, 2021.