

HOUSE BILL 786

O1, J1, F5

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By: **Delegate Kaiser**

Introduced and read first time: January 29, 2021

Assigned to: Appropriations

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.

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.