



February 18, 2020

**House Appropriations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 559**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities.

Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving nearly 75,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB 559- Family Investment Program-Temporary Cash Assistance- Funding. HB 559 increases the appropriation for the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program by requiring the Governor to provide funds in the budget to ensure that the value of TCA, combined with federal food stamps reaches 71% of the State Minimum Living level by FY 2026.

Maryland has one of the highest rates of Deep Poverty in the entire country: of individuals who live below the poverty line in Maryland, 48% - almost 1 in 2 – live at 50% of the poverty line or lower, which is \$6,380 for an individual. ¹ Regrettably, many of these individuals are the Marylanders receiving public benefits, as our benefit levels fall far short of bringing individuals even close to living near or above the poverty line. Currently, the Temporary Cash Assistance program – when combined with federal SNAP benefits – only equals 61% of the Maryland Minimum Living Level (MLL).

BHSB supports HB 559 because increases to TCA provides vital resources to families in deep poverty. Studies show that children living in deep poverty are five times more likely to experience abuse and neglect and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which begins a lifelong struggle with negative mental, behavioral, and physical health outcomes. ² Increasing funds to a families’ household budget can help mitigate children’s exposure to ACEs as it can help reduce parental stress help parents provide for their children. ³

The CDC estimates lifetime costs associated with ACEs at approximately \$2 trillion nationwide, measures that prevent and address childhood trauma not only work to improve the public health of our state, but also have a high rate of return on investment and decrease healthcare, education, and welfare program costs in the long term. Maryland must continue to enact policies that prevent and mitigate ACEs. An increase in TCA will provide families in deep poverty with much needed support. **As such, BHSB urges the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to support HB 559**

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¹ US Census Data 2019. American Community Survey Data

² <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>

³ http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/HTML_LargeReports/ACEs_2018_32691.pdf