

House Bill 946 Child Support – Child Support Guidelines

House Judiciary Committee
February 20, 2020

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 946, which seeks to update the current child support guidelines to reflect current economic data and to update and make transparent the self-support reserve within the child support guidelines schedule.¹

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth and families each year, we recognize the important role child support plays in lifting children out of poverty. We also recognize the personal and financial damage child support arrears can cause for low-income obligors.

HB 946 sets forth a number of steps that our state can take to bring child support orders more in line with ability to pay. These include:

1. **Updating the guidelines with current economic data** - Included in the proposed bill is an update to the SSR). The SSR is designed to provide the obligor with a minimum income after the payment of child support. HB 946 increases the SSR from \$867 to \$1,145 per month. \$1,145 represents 110% of the 2019 federal poverty level. When the obligor feels the process has recognizes his/her needs and leaves him/her with funds to meet those most basic needs, the obligor is more likely to make child support payments.
2. **Providing courts with additional guidance at the lower income end** - HB 946 adds support order amounts for combined incomes from \$0 to \$1,250 per month. In the current guidelines, the court is provided with a range to choose from and a case-level review found that almost 40% of order amounts were above range.² Of those above range orders, 1 in 3 were set a dollar or two below the first range.³ HB 946 provides specific schedule amounts to encourage right-sized orders.
3. **Codifying the existing case law definition of voluntary impoverishment in statute** - This will better enable pro se litigants the ability to defend against an accusation of voluntary impoverishment.
4. **Providing a list of factors for the potential income determination** - An examination of the state's child support caseload shows that potential income is often determined to be full-time minimum wage. The proposed factors in HB 946 require the court to take a closer look at specific factors affecting an obligor's potential income.

The consequences of uncollected child support can include a fractured relationship between the noncustodial parent and the custodial parent, fractured relationships between the noncustodial parent and his/her child(ren), and the collateral consequences of nonpayment of support (debt, driver's license suspension and wage garnishment). When a child support order is improperly set – all the parties lose.

Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 946.

Submitted By: Regan K. Vaughan, Director of Advocacy

¹ HB 946 is part of a package of bills developed by the Department of Human Services Child Support Guidelines Advisory (CSGA) Committee of which Catholic Charities is a member.

² Information provided to the CSGA by the Family Welfare & Research Training Group.

³ Ibid