



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 786

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

House Appropriations Committee

February 10, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports HB 786, which requires the Secretary of Human Services, Secretary of Health and the State Superintendent to work together to simplify application processes across the programs they are responsible for that support low-income Marylanders, called "Family Support Programs".

Despite our best efforts, there are more people living in poverty in Maryland now than 30 years ago. Before the pandemic, one in ten Marylanders were living at or below the Federal Poverty Line, and COVID has only exacerbated the struggles of low-income individuals and families. Predictably, the need for safety-net programs in our state has exploded since March of 2020, and has put a spotlight on the entrenched gaps, barriers, and inequities that have long existed in our programs and policies to address and end poverty, especially for Black and Brown communities that have disproportionately borne the brunt of the pandemic due to systemic racism and historic disinvestment. A dizzying maze of differing applications, countless departments, and varying eligibility requirements means that - even for Marylanders who qualify - safety net programs only reach a fraction of the people who need them.

Family support programs not only provide vital resources to low-income families, but these programs strengthen our State's economy. Families use benefits to purchase housing, food, transportation, and other basic needs. These funds are immediately spent in the local economy, generating economic growth. Consequently, improving access to family support programs not only assist the families receiving it, but it also benefits Maryland's businesses, communities, and local economies. A study from Arkansas' TANF cash program found for every dollar the state spent on benefits resulted in a return of \$1.79 to taxpayers, which is a significant return on investment for the state.¹ Without improving access to safety net programs, Marylanders will continue to bear the societal costs of homelessness and poverty.

HB 786 requires the heads of three major departments to work together to simply access to safety-net programs, which is an important step to improving systems. We know that MD THINK is supposed to create streamlined access to state-ran programs and benefits; however, technology alone cannot fix all of the barriers families face trying to access help. Requiring the State to examine what else can be done to improve access to support programs outside of MD THINK is an important endeavor.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 786.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ College Counts: Evidence of Impact. (2016). *Measuring a State's Return on Investment*.
http://www.metisassociates.com/our_work/downloads/Measuring_a_State_Return_on_Investment.pdf