



**HB 786 Department of Human Services, Maryland Department of Health, and Department of Education -
Easing Access to Family Support Programs**

Appropriations

February 10, 2021

SUPPORT

Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 786. This bill will require the heads of the state Departments of Human Services, Education and Health to meet regularly for one year and identify steps each can take to simplify the application process for aid to make the resources more accessible for low-income Marylanders.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

Currently, 20% of Marylanders are low-income¹ and are eligible to receive public benefits and services that could alleviate some of the strain of coping with meager resources. There are a number of government programs available, but accessing those programs can be a daunting task. Each department has separate application forms and similar but disconnected processes. This produces a confusing series of steps that fracture a family's time and resources into needlessly inefficient exertions. **The more distress an individual is experiencing means the less capacity they have to navigate through complicated processes.**

House Bill 786 would provide an opportunity for better coordination among these service agencies that could lead to a smoother experience for struggling families. The effects of COVID-19 have shown the need for the process to be as simple as possible. There's been an influx of individuals and families who are applying for assistance. Over the last year, CASH has seen a significant increase in our clients' needs pertaining to benefit screening. Maryland should focus on ensuring that individuals and families can access and receive the assistance they truly need.

For these reasons, we encourage you to return a favorable report on HB 786.

¹ <https://spotlightonpoverty.org/states/maryland/>