



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB 1076

Public Assistance Programs – Data Sharing and Review (Welfare Program Integrity Act of 2021)

House Appropriations Committee

March 11, 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
Mental Health Association of
Maryland
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) opposes HB 1076, which requires the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services to enter data-sharing agreements with the Department of Vital Records, Maryland Department of Labor, and the State Lottery and Gaming Control Agency to identify changes in circumstances that may alter a person's eligibility for certain public benefit programs.

HB 1076 is a solution searching for a problem, as it's a myth there is rampant "waste, fraud, and abuse" in welfare programs. Data from bipartisan congressional oversight and existing program integrity measures demonstrate that there is no evidence of widespread fraud in our safety-net programs that needs to be solved. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) error rates are at an all-time low, and error rates across all programs have been declining for years as programs have modernized through initiatives like placing benefits on Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. It is estimated that the fraud rate is about one cent on the dollar, which means it's exceedingly rare.¹

HB 1076 is not an efficient use of state resources and personnel. In order to implement the requirements of HB 1076, the state will need to dedicate resources, time, and personnel. As the Department of Health and Department of Human Services already struggle with caseworker vacancies and staffing shortages, moving any focus to unnecessary tasks in service to a myth about safety-net abuse is unproductive. As Maryland struggles with a difficult budget amidst a global pandemic, inserting a new data sharing requirement - when there is no research to indicate widespread welfare fraud exists - is a grossly inefficient use of State resources.

MAP is concerned bills like HB 1076 promote harmful, negative, and oppressive stereotypes about individuals who receive public benefits to make ends meet. There are countless government-funded programs, credits, and benefits that Marylanders receive, but it's only programs for low-income Marylanders that are targeted by this bill for extra scrutiny. This perpetuates incorrect and damaging narratives that individuals who receive public benefits lie about their income, hide assets, abuse the safety-net, and use their benefits improperly. These narratives disproportionately harm women, individuals of color, and low-income families and often lead to individuals on safety-net programs being treated as lazy, untrustworthy, and even criminal. Maryland should work to build public support for safety-net programs and our neighbors who need assistance – not undermine them.

For these reasons, MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue an unfavorable report for HB 1076.

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 Food and Nutrition Services. How FNS Fights SNAP Fraud, Waste and Abuse. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fraud>