



Welfare Advocates

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House Bill 889

Public Assistance Programs – Data Sharing and Review (Welfare Program Integrity Act of 2022)

House Appropriations Committee

March 10, 2022

OPPOSE

Welfare Advocates is a statewide coalition of community-based organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and consumers, whose mission it is to educate ourselves and the wider community and to advocate for an adequate safety net and public policies that support families moving to economic stability.

Welfare Advocates strongly opposes HB 889, 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, including Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

HB 889 is a solution looking 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 889 is not an efficient use of state resources and personnel. In order to implement the requirements of HB 889, 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, moving any focus to unnecessary tasks in service to a myth about safety-net abuse is unproductive. Especially as Maryland struggles with growing staffing shortages amidst an ongoing 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.

Welfare Advocates is concerned bills like HB 889 promote harmful, negative, and oppressive stereotypes about individuals who receive public benefits. There are countless government-funded programs, credits, and benefits that Marylanders receive, but it's only programs for low-income Marylanders, like Medicaid and SNAP, 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. Propagating these stereotypes 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 the reasons stated above, we respectfully urge an unfavorable report on HB 889.

Submitted by Lisa Klingenmaier, Chair of Welfare Advocates

¹ Food and Nutrition Services. How FNS Fights SNAP Fraud, Waste and Abuse. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fraud>