

Testimony in Support of HB 1043

Family Investment Program – Eligibility, Work Experience, Community Service, and Reports – Alterations
House Appropriations Committee, March 10, 2022

Testimony of Kendra James
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Chair McIntosh and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the chance to give you my testimony in support of House Bill 1043, which will improve the Temporary Cash Assistance program by giving families more choice of their work activity options, flexibility in schedule, improve skills and experiences while people are participating in the program, and lead to families finding better jobs with higher wages. I am a single parent, receive TCA and would like to share with you my experience with the Department of Social Services (DSS) when I came to apply for TCA...

--- DSS WORKER- "Homeless or not you can't receive benefits without birth certificates for you and your kids"

---DSS WOKER-"Sit your daughter at the McDonald's across the street from the work activity site with fries and a soda until you're done".

---DSS WOKER-"Well you have to be doing something, you can't just sit and receive benefits..... You gotta come back here every ten days with a letter from the shelter stating you still live there, if you don't we will terminate your benefits".

--- Me: "My kids (10 and 14 at the time) are in summer camp provided by the shelter. I found a class I would like to take at Goodwill that works with this schedule due to the fact that my 14 year old has aged out of a voucher, however she CANNOT BE LEFT AT THE SHELTER ALONE OR WITH ANY OTHER ADULT THAT LIVES AT THE SHELTER (per shelter policy) Can I take this course for work activity hours"?

-DSS WORKER: "Well we can't tell you no, but we no longer work with Goodwill, so if you go to that program your TCA case will be terminated".

DSS-- YOUR CASE HAS BEEN TERMINATED DUE TO EMPLOYMENT.... (Fact is all I had received at the time was a letter stating I was hired... I never worked one hour before my case was terminated and the manager told me they never had to do so much for a person on welfare.... So ultimately the things I was being asked to do by DSS were bothersome and he chose not to allow me to work. But my case was still terminated).

I was new to Baltimore and came here in the middle of a crisis in search of safety and resources. I was met with very personal questions about information DSS did not even need, I felt bullied by DSS, and they gave me a really hard time. The interaction with DSS was very traumatic. I do understand policy but the way the DSS workers treat their customers is like bootcamp not welcoming or helpful at all..... I was told all kinds of stories on how when their kids were younger they got out here and did what they

had to do... But I needed help and it was very hard to find in a place called DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES.

Why is it so hard to receive help??

Why do we get treated like the scum of the earth??

Do you think any of what you just read is right or just??

I'm so pleased to say that this is no longer my story and my hope is that with HB1043 being passed history won't have to repeat its self.... We just want a fair chance at being, doing, and creating better lives for ourselves and the future of our families.... Are you willing to help us help ourselves?

Thank You.