



Ashley Black, Staff Attorney
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, ext. 224
blacka@publicjustice.org

SB 828

Family Investment Program – Eligibility, Work Experience, Community Service and Reports - Alterations Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee

March 10, 2022

1:00 PM

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. **PJC stands in strong support of SB 828**, which would utilize federally allowable flexibilities for the State to redesign the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) mandatory work program to be trauma-informed, client-centered and to promote racial equity and anti-racism.

TCA is an important resource for over 22,000 low-income families in Maryland and supports basic needs, such as housing and food. When families are able to meet their basic needs, the overall health of the household, including children, is positively impacted. Though adult recipients of TCA are required to work, more than 25% of these families are working without pay. This issue disproportionately impacts TCA recipients who are Black and those who identify as women. Further, though the goal of TCA is to promote self-sufficiency, unpaid work does not leave participants with the necessary skills or training to secure unsubsidized employment. Maryland's existing TCA policies are rooted in the harmful and false narrative that not only must labor be compelled, but also that not all labor is worthy of payment. SB 828 seeks to disrupt this narrative and bring meaningful changes to Maryland's TCA program by reducing barriers to TCA and obtaining paid work experience. SB 828 would transform what counts as work experience and provide families with options for their placement. As a result, TCA would empower families.

Not only is SB 828 good policy, but it is informed by individuals with lived experience participating in the TCA program. PJC is a member of the DHS Program Advancement Through Community Outreach Workgroup alongside DHS, FIA, advocates and individuals with lived experience with TCA. This Workgroup centers the voices of individuals with lived experience by empowering them to provide their insight and expertise on barriers to accessing TCA based in their own experiences with DHS and FIA. SB 828 centers these voices by incorporating their recommendations.

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 828**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.