



**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF**

SB 829 – Department of Human Services - Family Investment Program - Contract and Program Review

**Senate Finance Committee
March 10, 2022**

Health Care for the Homeless supports SB 829, which requires the Department of Human Services to hire an outside consultant to conduct a thorough review of the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) Program to ensure the program is employing best practices that will achieve meaningful outcomes for family economic stability. In particular, the bill requires that any non-governmental entities that the government contracts with for work activity requirements have performance-based incentives for 1) education and training, 2) job placement and placement wage, 3) employment retention, and 4) exiting TCA due to earnings that are at least 150% of the state's minimum wage. The bill also has a focus on providing accommodations to people with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness.

Health Care for the Homeless works with many clients who utilize TCA and we have an inherent understanding of the importance of this program for families experiencing poverty as well as the barriers the current TCA system erects in preventing families from exiting homelessness. As a former Health Care for the Homeless social worker in pediatrics has stated:

Imagine that you and your children suddenly became homeless, having no place to go and no income – no means of paying for a place to stay. After many weeks on a waiting list, you arrive at a shelter and are provided with a bed to sleep in a congregated room with many other families. You are informed that the shelter resources are limited and you will eventually need to pay for your own supplies like toilet paper, diapers, personal hygiene items, clothes, shoes and transportation. Or you're meeting with a case worker, at a shelter or community agency, to discuss housing options but since you don't have an income you cannot apply for any programs because of the application fees, security deposit and the required proof of income. Maybe you have a doctor's appointment for yourself or your child, but since you don't have an income, you do not have transportation to get to the appointment. Perhaps you need to call your children's school or schedule medical appointments but due to no income, you can't pay for a phone.

Everyone has the right to have essential needs met such as food and shelter. For homeless families with children, the stress from trying to obtain shelter, food and personal items is enormous. Having access to a source of income while trying to get on your feet, secure housing and employment, is vital to the health of homeless families with children.

TCA is a starting point for families to move from homelessness to stability. Since most housing programs require clients to have an income, TCA enables families experiencing homelessness access to these programs so they can obtain stable housing. When clients are forced into unpaid and unskilled work that denies them employment opportunities after exiting TCA, this can delay access to housing and increase their shelter stay. For families who are housed, the current TCA unpaid work requirements can jeopardize housing and result in homelessness.

Reviewing the TCA program, as SB 829 intends, also helps dismantle historically racist policies. The federal TANF program – particularly the strict work requirement - is rooted in a history of racism that perpetuates false and harmful assumptions about families living in poverty.¹ Far too often, TCA recipients are placed into temporary, unpaid work experience activities with little to no opportunity for employment after they have completed their placement. Recipients who are forced into these unpaid work experience placements have the most difficulty securing employment after TCA, and overall make the lowest earnings post-TCA.²

If Maryland is going to reduce the number of households living in deep poverty and increase employment, the TCA contracts must be improved. SB 829 improves education, employment outcomes, and wages. This bill is a critical measure in improving the lives of people living in the deepest of poverty. As such, we urge a favorable report on SB 829.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.

¹ [Life After Welfare Series - University of Maryland, Baltimore \(umaryland.edu\)](http://www.umaryland.edu)

² <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/work-supports-and-initiatives/workactivities.pdf?&>