



March 10, 2022

Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

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

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 829- Department of Human Services- Family Investment Administration- Contract and Program Review. This bill requires the Department of Human Services to hire an outside consultant to conduct a thorough review of the Temporary Cash Assistance Program- through a trauma-informed, anti-racist, client centered assessment- to ensure the program is employing best practices that will achieve meaningful outcomes for family economic stability. In addition, the bill requires the Department to annually review all of their contracts with workforce vendors to examine if the programs are providing tangible, marketable skills that lead to quality employment opportunities for TCA recipients.

The Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program serves families with children who live in deep poverty. TCA, the cash assistance part of Maryland’s TANF program, was created as part of Welfare Reform in the mid-nineties. Today, over 22,000 Maryland’s families have to rely on TCA to meet their basic needs, and more than 70% of TCA recipients are children. ¹ Families use TCA benefits to purchase housing, food, transportation, and other basic needs.

BHSB supports SB 829 because it will require a thorough investigation of the TCA program and make recommendations to improve the program trauma -informed lens. Studies show that children living in deep poverty are five times more likely to experience abuse and neglect and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which begins a lifelong struggle with negative mental, behavioral, and physical health outcomes. ² A meaningful review of the TCA program will help to ensure that it is employing best practices to achieve meaningful outcomes for family economic stability. Economic stability for families helps to mitigate children’s exposure to ACEs as it reduces parental stress by helping them with the resources needed to care for their children.

The CDC estimates lifetime costs associated with ACEs at approximately \$2 trillion nationwide, measures that prevent and address childhood trauma not only work to improve the public health of our state, but also have a high rate of return on investment and decrease healthcare, education, and welfare program costs in the long term. Maryland must continue to enact policies such as the one in SB 829 that prevent and mitigate ACEs. **As such, BHSB urges the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 829.**

¹ DHS Caseload Data. FY2021.

² <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>