



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 829

Department of Human Services – Family Investment Program – Contract & Program Review 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 829**, which would require certain contractors with the Family Investment Program (FIP) to provide services in a manner that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It would also require the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) to collect and report certain data and hire a consultant to make recommendations on the FIP.

As the state agency that administers vital public benefits programs, including Temporary Cash Assistance and the Temporary Disability Assistance Program, DHS touches the lives of many low-income individuals and families, many of whom have experienced trauma. The strength of the FIP depends on DHS understanding and meeting the needs of the populations it serves and ensuring that the contractors it employs are doing the same. FIP participants with disabilities in particular experience significant challenges to participating in programs and activities when the entities contracted with DHS do not meet federal standards for providing disability related accommodations. This can result in inequities in program outcomes for individuals with disabilities as compared to individuals without disabilities participating in the FIP. By virtue of administering programs that impact health and economic security, DHS is in a unique position to prevent further trauma of its client communities navigating its benefits programs and promote empowerment.

SB 829 would put in place much needed protections for individuals with disabilities by requiring contractors with the FIP to adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Similarly, by requiring DHS to hire an independent consultant to conduct a review of the FIP and collect and report crucial data, DHS will be better able to make needed and timely changes to the FIP's design that increase equity and accessibility for benefits recipients. SB 829, if passed, would also allow for meaningful and authentic input from stakeholders, including individuals with lived experience receiving benefits, to DHS to collaborate in shaping its programming.

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.

SB 829 would not only hold DHS and its contractors accountable to increasing access to the FIP to low-income individuals and families, but it would also transform the FIP in a way that empowers its diverse client communities. For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 829**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.