



Welfare Advocates

Founded 1979

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Senate Bill 26

Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children's Health Program and Social Services Programs – Eligibility and Enrollment

Senate Finance Committee

February 2, 2023

Support

Welfare Advocates is a statewide coalition of social service organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and community members, whose mission it is to educate about and advocate for an adequate safety net and public policies that support families moving towards economic stability.

Welfare Advocates supports SB 26, which requires the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health to streamline access to safety-net programs by automatically enrolling individuals in public benefits based on their eligibility for other safety-net programs.

Amidst record inflation and unemployment, many Marylanders are struggling to make ends meet. Before the pandemic, one in ten Marylanders were living at or below the Federal Poverty Line, and COVID has only exacerbated the struggles of low-income individuals and families.¹ Predictably, the need for safety-net programs in our state has exploded, and has put a spotlight on the entrenched barriers and inequities that have long existed in our programs and policies to address and end poverty, especially for Black and Brown communities that have disproportionately borne the brunt of economic downturns due to systemic racism and historic disinvestment. A dizzying maze of applications, departments, and varying eligibility requirements means that - even for Marylanders who qualify – safety-net programs only reach a fraction of the people who need them.

Public benefit programs – like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid - provide vital resources to low-income families, and strengthen our State's economy. Families use benefits to purchase housing, food, transportation, and other basic needs. These funds are immediately spent in the local economy, generating economic growth. Consequently, improving access to safety-net programs benefits families and Maryland's businesses, communities, and local economies. In regards to health coverage, studies demonstrate that individuals who are uninsured have higher rates of illness, die younger, and are often only one emergency department visit away from a financial crisis.² Without improving access to safety-net programs, Marylanders will continue to bear the societal costs of uncompensated care, homelessness, and poverty.

SB 26 simplifies access to safety-net programs by automatically enrolling individuals in benefits they are eligible for based on their eligibility for other programs. Welfare Advocates believes that all Marylanders should have easy access to the public benefits they are eligible for, and categorical eligibility is an important step to improve the economic security of Marylanders struggling in or near poverty.

WA appreciates your consideration, and respectfully urges a favorable report on SB 26.

Submitted by Lisa Klingenmaier, *Chair of Welfare Advocates*

¹ US Census Bureau. 2020. American Community Survey

² Kaiser Family Foundation. 2022. *Key Facts about the Uninsured Population*. <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/issue-brief/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>
