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HB 111

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

Hearing of The House Health & Government Operations Committee

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3:00 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 and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC strongly supports HB 111**, which would require MDH to establish an Express Lane Eligibility Program by January 1, 2025, to enroll individuals in Medicaid and the Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP) based on their eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP). It would also require DHS to automatically enroll individuals in SNAP who are financially eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Likewise, it would require the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) to enroll in fuel and utility assistance programs any individuals who are financially eligible for SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), SSI or means-tested Veterans Affairs benefits.

HB 111 streamlines the application process for low-income individuals and families who qualify for safety net services, like Medicaid, SNAP and energy assistance, to meet their needs. Based on their income, many individuals and families struggling to make ends meet qualify for critical safety net services. However, administrative burdens, such as filling out multiple applications, and lack of community outreach and education about these programs hinder individuals who qualify from accessing them. Access to healthcare, food and energy are social determinants of health and when these needs are not met, low-income Marylanders can suffer from poor health outcomes, including malnutrition and chronic illness.

HB 111 stands for the principle that no Marylander should have to go without food, access to timely health care or electricity simply because they cannot afford these essentials. HB 111 would allow over 60,000 uninsured individuals to obtain automatic Medicaid eligibility based on their receipt of SNAP benefits. It would also allow TANF recipients, a program reserved for families with children living in deep poverty, to be automatically

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enrolled in fuel and utility assistance programs. Similarly, seniors who are eligible for SSI would have a pathway to addressing food insecurity as HB 111 would authorize DHS to automatically enroll them in SNAP.

HB 111 puts Maryland's low-income individuals and families, including children and seniors, in a better position to address their time-sensitive needs and achieve their highest level of health. If passed, this legislation would enable our State to better eliminate economic and racial inequities in health outcomes.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 111**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 ext. 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.