



**Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony in Support of HB111
Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children's Health Program, and Social Services
Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment
February 7, 2023**

TO: The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair; The Honorable Ariana Kelly, Vice Chair; and
Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee
FROM: Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County's local, state, and federally designated anti-poverty group, strongly supports HB111. This bill helps to address a significant challenge for many lower-income Marylanders, which is access to critical services. The bill would create an "Express Lane Eligibility" for Medical Assistance and the Children's Health Program for those who are already eligible for SNAP. The bill would also establish categorical eligibility for SNAP for those who are eligible for SSI, along with categorical eligibility for energy assistance programs for those who qualify for SNAP, TANF, SSI, or means-tested Veterans Affairs benefits.

The issue that HB111 aims to address, improving access to services, has been a primary focus for the Community Action Agency, a program of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, and our board. Many residents struggle to access services simply because the system is so complex and the application processes are so lengthy. Participants in our board's advocacy training program for lower-income residents, the Community Advocacy Institute, share that it is extremely difficult to access social services in the County, often due to confusion about eligibility requirements, but also because of lack of awareness, language barriers, lack of transportation, and lack of time. These barriers are a primary area of concern highlighted in our Agency's Community Needs Assessment, which will soon be finalized and posted on the Community Action website.

To address these concerns, the Community Action Agency has been at the forefront of working with DHHS and partners to establish a navigation program in Montgomery County, based on our Agency's decades of experience in delivering services to a diverse population at the Takoma- East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center in Long Branch. Like the TESS staff, highly trained navigators work closely with residents and our DHHS colleagues, including those within DHHS Eligibility & Support Services, and community-based nonprofit partners, to connect them with a wide variety of services. This helps clients avoid the need to travel to multiple offices, often utilizing public transportation, to simply apply for services. The navigation program uses a 2Gen/Whole Family approach to address the needs of everyone in a household, applying best practices from The Maryland Community Action Partnership, which receives funding from the Maryland Department of Human Services to advance this practice across the state.

The Community Action Board strongly supports this bill as it will improve access to important services for Maryland residents. We encourage the Committee to explore other programs and policies that will reduce barriers for individuals and families trying to access services, including additional funding for 2Gen/Whole Family services like the navigation program described above. We ask the Committee for a favorable report for HB 111.