

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0694- Governor's Office for Children - Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024) - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide favorable testimony in support of House Bill 694 (HB 694), the ENOUGH Act of 2024. With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, we empower Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to workforce development and career opportunities.

The ENOUGH Act will lay the foundation for eliminating childhood poverty in Maryland. The Act will channel private, philanthropic and state resources toward communities across the state with high rates of generational child poverty. The persistent lack of resources and sudden change or volatility in a family's economic situation negatively impacts parent, child, and family well-being. The legislation lifts up Marylanders at the intersection of DHS's two most important missions—improving child welfare and empowering those who are excluded from or marginalized in the economy. The ENOUGH Act establishes grant funding to end child poverty at the local level using a data driven, place-based, and targeted approach. In addition, the Act will support basing strategies on local and national best practices.

While broader economic and policy factors drive poverty, children, youth, and their families are impacted by their environment. State policy should center the lived experiences of children and their families to better align neighborhood and community resources. The Act recognizes sustainable change requires local, grassroots efforts tailored to the people closest to the problems because they are closest to the solutions. By following the data, we believe in efficient and effective investment of resources.

Without coordinated interventions to alleviate adverse childhood experiences, multi-generational cycles of poverty become even harder to disrupt; leading to immense moral, social, and economic costs over time, and disproportionately impacting populations that have been marginalized.

The ENOUGH Act calls on community leaders to come together and create comprehensive plans on how to make their neighborhoods better, on their terms. Maryland has a responsibility, through fiscal, social, and economic policy, to partner with communities to address historical inequities to achieve a higher standard of living. We believe it reduces family stress and the likelihood of a child or youth experiencing traumatic and expensive, unnecessary child welfare involvement.



National research highlights families experiencing poverty are more likely to be reported for child neglect through no fault of their own. Neglect is the most common type of reported child maltreatment in the U.S with 75% of reports to child protective services involving allegations of neglect according to the United States Children's Bureau. Neglect is often reported when a caregiver is unable to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision, threatening a child's safety.

However, an inability of a family to provide necessities for their children is not the same as an unwillingness to provide. Stabilizing families with economic assistance or concrete support can build protective factors and decrease reports of neglect. Child maltreatment rates have declined by 56% over the past 30 years, but by contrast, rates of reported child neglect remain high. The University of Washington researchers found states that offer a refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) experienced a significant drop in state-level reports of child maltreatment. Specifically, for each additional \$1,000 in per-child EITC refund, state reports of child maltreatment to child welfare authorities declined 5% in the weeks following.

The ENOUGH Act establishes a grant program to:

- Increase community health and safety;
- Strengthen "cradle to career" access to high-quality education and care;
- Enable family-sustaining income and access to affordable housing, child care, and health care, including behavioral and mental health services;
- Connects residents to quality jobs; and
- Provides high-quality support for children with disabilities, child welfare, and justice involved youth.

We believe the ENOUGH Act will generate actionable data and research on effective community-led, anti-poverty models for potential replication in future DHS-administered programs, and will be a force driving innovation in how we provide technical assistance, engage grassroots partners, and evaluate outcomes. Creating a centralized coordination office—the Governor's Office for Children—to assist with identifying, planning, and awareness-building in alignment with DHS priorities will prove invaluable as we leverage evidence-based, place-based programming statewide.

DHS serves as one of Maryland's leading child welfare and anti-poverty organizations and strongly supports the ENOUGH Act's approach. While money is extremely important, strategy is imperative. The Act will help us all spend smarter and wiser across all state programs.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide favorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. We look forward to the decision of the Committee and welcome continued collaboration on HB0694. If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,



Rafael López
Secretary