February 26, 2024

To: Maryland House of Delegates, Appropriations Committee
From: Josh Davis, Vice President of Policy and Partnerships
Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland's ENOUGH Act (SB 482 / HB 694)

Good afternoon. My name is Josh Davis and I represent StriveTogether where we work nationally to ensure every child has the best chance to succeed in life, regardless of race, zip code, ethnicity or socioeconomic level born into.

For far too long generational cycles of poverty and lack of opportunity have held back Maryland children and families from the serenity of the eastern shore to the soaring western mountains. That is why StriveTogether is proud to support the ENOUGH Act, legislation reimagining how the State of Maryland uplifts children and families and gives those in underserved or under-resourced areas a chance to better their situation.

The ENOUGH Act will fund and assist the development of new neighborhood and regional place-based partnerships while strengthening existing ones through a competitive grant process administered by the Governor's Office for Children. This grant program will support Maryland's children and young people through education opportunities and career readiness. Additionally, the bill will boost families and communities by providing access to good jobs, safe neighborhoods, affordable housing, and quality healthcare, including mental health services.

Through place-based initiatives, this legislation will target the root causes of hardship in communities – rural, suburban, and urban – that have disproportionately high numbers of children living in poverty. Place-based initiatives take an evidence-based approach, looking at what children, families, and neighborhoods actually need, and providing concrete social services like education programs, family support, community development, and healthcare for those who need it most, changing the trajectory and outcomes for a child's future college and career success.

Maryland has a strong track record of supporting education projects, including complementary initiatives like the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Passed in 2021, the Blueprint increases education funding to accelerate student outcomes and improve the quality of the state's schools. The ENOUGH Act takes this one step

further, deploying a whole-of-community approach, designed to give communities the support and resources needed to uplift children and families, and ultimately combat poverty. The strength of the ENOUGH Act is that it will create critical infrastructure for place-based partnerships, expand access to resources to implement this work throughout Maryland, and set a national example for statewide investments in economic mobility. Furthermore, the ENOUGH Act will align and leverage cross-sector community partners for the equitable distribution of services for children and families; promote systems change by funding and advocating for programs and policy changes across the state; and collect, assess, and share data by working with partner organizations and communities to identify the needs within neighborhoods, implement evidence-based solutions, and use data to continuously improve programs.

And notably, this bill is intentional about ensuring that the voices of those closest to the problem are centered in finding a solution. A key part of the ENOUGH Act entails working with community organizations, non-profits, anchor institutions, and other key community members to develop locally-focused, targeted plans of action to address poverty.

For these reasons, we enthusiastically support the ENOUGH Act and believe it will be a national example for states around the country in the fight against child poverty. Maryland is already the proud home to many businesses and has one of the best hospital networks in the nation. The infrastructure exists for them to be successful and when combined with additional outside funding, can be a model for the nation.

We know that a child's ability to access opportunities that allow for social and economic mobility is contingent on them growing up in strong and supportive homes in thriving communities. The ENOUGH Act is the kind of all-hands-on-deck, whole-of-government approach that is critical to transforming communities and building a future where no child's potential is limited by their zip code. Through the ENOUGH Act, Maryland will invest in local and regional place-based networks that are equity focused, data-driven, and have the capacity to identify the highest needs within the most under-resourced neighborhoods.

By passing this legislation, we will unlock the promise of all Maryland children, placing them on a path to academic success while also strengthening families, fostering community engagement, and instilling civic pride.

StriveTogether urges the passage of the ENOUGH Act and is grateful for the opportunity to express our strong approval of this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Vice President, Policy and Partnerships