



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
HB694: Governor's Office for Children - Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions,
Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024)

February 28, 2024

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

TO: The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair; The Honorable Mark S. Chang, Vice Chair; and Members
of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board (CAB), the County's local, state, and
federally designated anti-poverty group, is in support of HB694, the ENOUGH Act of 2024, with
a proposed amendment.

Child poverty continues to be a widespread concern in Maryland, including in Montgomery
County. Twenty-nine Census tracts in the County have a child poverty rate of 20% or higher.¹
The ENOUGH Act's establishment of grants for programs working to reduce child poverty could
greatly benefit numerous nonprofit and public agencies here in Montgomery County and across
the state.

It is important to note that although HB694 focuses on child poverty, the very high cost of living
in areas like Montgomery County means that many children in households above the Federal
Poverty Level are still struggling. The 2023 Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard, which
provides a more accurate measure of the true cost of living, notes that a family of three with
one adult, one preschooler, and one school-age child would need an annual income of
\$116,864 to cover their basic expenses - over four and half times the Federal Poverty Level.²

Nationwide, Community Action has been a leader in addressing poverty for nearly 60 years and
for over 55 years here in Montgomery County. Our own agency has several programs that aim
to reduce child poverty. The agency's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program
completed over 1,900 tax returns for lower-income County households last year, reducing child
poverty by connecting clients with \$2,375,603 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$757,849 in
Child Tax Credits.

¹ <https://data.census.gov/>

² https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/MDMontCo2023_SSS.pdf

The TESS Community Action Center continues its 50+ year legacy of connecting residents to essential services using culturally and linguistically specific service delivery. Every month, TESS, along with the agency's new Navigation team, addresses the needs of hundreds of clients, the vast majority of whom are families with children, connecting residents with SNAP, healthcare, housing assistance, child care assistance, and numerous other critical services.

As our board serves as the governing body for Head Start, along with the Head Start Parent Policy Council, we are consistently engaged in providing direct services for eligible children and families. The Montgomery County Head Start Program has addressed the root causes of generational poverty for over 55 years by providing access to education for children and their parents, as well as health and nutrition services, parent involvement opportunities, and access to community resources such as housing, employment, food and social services. With current funding, Head Start/PreK programs serve 3,183 children in lower-income households, but many more children in our community are income-eligible for these programs and remain unserved.

Given Community Action's extensive experience working to reduce poverty in Maryland and across the country, we recommend an amendment to the legislation. **We propose that 50% of the funding allocated for the ENOUGH Act be made available exclusively to Community Action Agencies, as identified by the Maryland Community Action Partnership (MCAP).** These agencies have a proven track record of effectively addressing community needs and are well-positioned to implement the objectives outlined in the bill. We believe that this amendment will enhance the impact of the ENOUGH Act by leveraging the expertise and existing infrastructure of Community Action Agencies, ultimately contributing to a more targeted and efficient implementation of the program.

When it comes to supporting the ENOUGH Act, Community Action has implemented several ways to help our community continue to emerge from poverty. The ENOUGH Act can continue to move Maryland in the right direction.

The Montgomery County Community Action Board strongly supports HB694 with the proposed amendment and asks the Committee for its support.