
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 370
Community Schools – Rental Assistance for Community School Families
Program and Fund – Establishment
Budget & Taxation Committee
January 31, 2024

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 370, which will establish an eviction prevention program for eligible Community School families to receive funding for up to 12 months to cover the cost of rent and utility payments, late fees, and arrears. SB 370 establishes the Community School Coordinator as the distributor of such funds and identifies the State Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Housing and Community Development as the program’s primary administrators.

SB 370 will increase the capacity of Community Schools to holistically support the needs of its families by going beyond academic services to support general family wellbeing. Educators have a stake in the holistic wellbeing and stability of its families; the Community School model already asserts its commitment to this in its mission to “promote positive, equitable outcomes by providing students and families with the physical and mental health, academic, and extracurricular supports needed to thrive”.¹ This funding will bolster the ability of Community Schools to meet family needs and promote their engagement in school services.

SB 370 will improve housing stability for Maryland’s school children and their families. It is well documented that housing security is a social determinant of health; the physical condition of a home, the conditions of the neighborhood, and housing affordability have significant implications for a family’s ability to establish permanency in their community.² Rising rent costs put undue financial burden on families, pushing many to choose between falling behind in rent and putting themselves at risk for eviction or meeting basic needs like nutritious food, preventative medical care, and heating, all needs that are important to the development of school-aged youth. In Maryland, over 125,000 families are paying more than 30% of their income toward rent and other housing-related costs.³ The eviction prevention funding provided to families from this fund could alleviate this burden and further promote the wellbeing of our

¹ Maryland State Department of Education. (n.d.). *Office of Community Schools and Expanded Learning Time*. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/Community-Schools/Index.aspx>

² Braveman, Paula, Mercedes Dekker, Susan Egerter, Tabashir Sadegh-Nobari, and Craig Pollack. 2011. “Housing and Health.” Issue Brief #7: Exploring the Social Determinants of Health. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America. <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2011/05/housing-and-health.html>.

³ Desmond M. Housing. In: Grusky D, Varner C, Mattingly M, eds. *State of the Union: The Poverty and Inequality Report*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality; 2017:16-19.

Maryland Community School families.

SB 370 will contribute positively to academic engagement and performance, ensuring greater equity in outcomes for Maryland’s students. Children whose families are navigating housing instability, poverty, and unsafe living conditions are “profoundly affected by their environments during key developmental stages”.⁴ Research indicates that “adolescents living in poor-quality housing have lower math and reading scores” compared to their peers and “substandard housing” is one of the strongest predictors for behavioral and emotional problems in young children.⁵

SB 370 furthers racial and gender justice. Black households and households led by women have avoided eviction at disproportionately high rates – 74% and 70%, respectively – as a result of the state’s current emergency rental assistance program.⁶ Such households will likely face significantly higher rates of eviction unless the Governor and General Assembly take actions like SB 370.

We understand that the bill sponsor, Sen. Hettleman, will work with advocates, the Maryland State Dept. of Education, and the Dept. of Housing and Community Development to refine the administrative structure of the program and minimize the burden on Community School Coordinators. We also understand and support changing the current prioritization in the bill to better address the needs of families who are homeless or most at risk of homelessness.

Housing stability is integral to the security and success of Maryland’s students in Community Schools. The development of an eviction prevention program is a significant step forward in maintaining safety nets that support family stability in their school neighborhoods, further promoting family engagement and removing barriers to student learning and participation.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 370.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁴ MacArthur Foundation. (n.d.). *Housing: Why Educators, Health Professionals and Those Focused on Economic Mobility Should Care About It*. MacArthur Foundation.

https://www.macfound.org/media/files/why_educators_health_professionals_those_focused_economic_mobility_should_care.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Emily Badger, Claire Cain Miller, and Alicia Parlapiano, The Americans Most Threatened by Eviction: Young Children, N.Y. Times, October 2, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/02/upshot/evictions-children-american-renters.html>