

February 29, 2024

The Honorable Will Smith, Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 481 - The Speaker - Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act 2024 -
POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of Senate Bill 481 (SB 481). 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 Child Support Administration, the Family Investment Administration, and the Social Services Administration within DHS implement service programs which are impacted by SB 481.

We serve over one million Marylanders a year, many of which struggle with economic insecurity especially around housing affordability and stability. The Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024 would provide first right of refusal for tenants to purchase the property where they live when it is for sale. Providing three months for tenant purchasers to secure financing encourages families to purchase their homes and build family wealth. Together these provisions would provide an opportunity for long-term housing stability for families. Families would also benefit from the Office of Tenants' Rights providing information about financial and credit counseling. The tenant protection provisions are important for obtaining and maintaining family housing stability.

Based on our early analysis, we offer below an estimate of the impact of Senate Bill 481 on Marylanders served by our department, specifically within our child welfare and economic support programs.

From 2018 to 2022, DHS had 9,314 entries into foster care. Ten percent of children entering foster care experienced housing insecurity as a circumstance in child removal and family separation. Inadequate housing frequently contributes to or exacerbates other safety risks that result in removing children from their families. The number of cases with housing identified as a contributing issue has been on the decline from 2018 to 2020 but significantly increased in 2021 and 2022. Improving housing stability advances Maryland's efforts to keep children safely with their families.



In addition, youth aging out of foster care require stable housing options. Local Departments of Social Services help with Family Reunification Program (FUP) vouchers for families where housing is a barrier to reunification and for foster youth, 18-23, who have or are at risk of aging out of foster care to homelessness. As of November 2023, Maryland housing authorities have 1,064 FUP vouchers available with 83% currently in use. Prince George's County uses the most vouchers (402), followed by Baltimore City (194).

Families participating in economic support programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), and Emergency Assistance to Families with Children program (EAFC), will also benefit from SB 481. Through EAFC, we provide cash assistance to families who need emergency help paying rent or utilities or for other emergencies. In 2022-2023, we received a staggering 45,363 EAFC applications.

All households experiencing economic insecurity are likely to struggle with housing instability. Currently, 133,325 households participate in SNAP. The number of households participating in TCA is 15,959. Twenty-two percent of SNAP participants experiencing homelessness are also receiving TCA. Strikingly, the number of SNAP-alone households who identify as experiencing homelessness is 2,714; and 416 SNAP and TCA households with children identify as experiencing homelessness.

We support SB 481 as a critical lever in the Governor's vision to end childhood poverty in Maryland. SB 481 increases the continuity of care when children and families are at risk of eviction, homelessness, or family separation related to housing instability. We can, and must, do better by the people we serve.

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 SB 481.

If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,



Rafael López
Secretary