
TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HOUSE BILL 1402
Maryland Department of Health and Department of Human Services – Public
Benefits – Prevention of Waste, Fraud, and Abuse
Appropriations and Health and Government Operations Committees
March 4, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change (SWASC) strongly opposes HB 1402, which requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) to enter data-sharing agreements with various federal and state agencies to identify changes in circumstances that may alter a person’s eligibility for public benefit programs, including Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). HB 1402 also prohibits using categorical eligibility, which allows streamlined and efficient enrollment into programs when families are already deemed eligible for other public benefits.

HB 1402 is an inefficient use of state resources and personnel at a time when federal attacks and cuts jeopardize public services for Marylanders. To implement the requirements of HB 1402, Maryland will need to dedicate resources, time, and personnel. As MDH and DHS already struggle with caseworker vacancies, moving any focus away from critical work to unnecessary tasks in service to a myth about safety-net abuse is unproductive. Especially as Maryland struggles with a massive structural budget deficit and a challenging federal Administration, inserting a new data-sharing requirement - when there is no research to indicate widespread public benefits fraud exists – is a grossly inefficient use of state resources.

HB 1402 addresses a nonexistent problem. It is a myth that there is rampant “waste, fraud, and abuse” in public benefit programs. Data from bipartisan congressional oversight and existing program integrity measures demonstrate no evidence of widespread fraud in our safety-net programs that needs to be solved. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) error rates are at an all-time low, and error rates across all programs have been declining for years as programs have modernized through initiatives like placing benefits on Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. The fraud rate for SNAP is about one cent on the dollar, which means it’s exceedingly rare.

SWASC is concerned that bills like HB 1402 promote harmful, negative, and oppressive stereotypes about individuals who receive public benefits. There are countless government-funded programs, credits, and benefits that Marylanders receive, but only programs for low-income Marylanders, like Medicaid and SNAP, are targeted by this bill for extra scrutiny. This perpetuates incorrect and damaging narratives that disproportionately harm women, individuals of color, and low-income families. Propagating these stereotypes often leads to individuals utilizing safety-net programs being treated as if they are lazy, untrustworthy, and even criminal. Moreover, these false



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narratives erode public support for these vital programs, rendering them less effective by reducing their reach.

As social work students, we are deeply concerned about the ethical implications of HB 1402. This bill disregards the inherent dignity and worth of individuals relying on essential public benefits. It fosters an environment of suspicion and distrust, exacerbating the stress and anxiety already faced by vulnerable populations. Instead of addressing the systemic causes of poverty and need, it perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces oppressive power dynamics. Our profession demands that we advocate for policies that uplift and empower, not those that further marginalize and dehumanize. We urge the committee to consider the human cost of this legislation and reject its punitive approach.

Instead of creating unnecessary barriers, Maryland should strengthen its support for vulnerable residents. HB 1402 undermines the very programs designed to assist those in need.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges an unfavorable report on HB 1402.

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.