



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 881

Family Investment Program and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits - Child Support

TO: Hon. Ben Barnes, Chair, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Zachary Alberts, Director of Advocacy

The Center for Urban Families (CFUF), a West Baltimore workforce and family-strengthening community-based organization, advocates for legislative initiatives that strengthen urban communities by helping fathers and families achieve stability and economic success.

CFUF is thrilled to support Delegate Shetty's House Bill 881, which would ensure that all child support ends up where it belongs – in the hands of the children for whom it is meant. The Child Support programs' roots are in 19th century anti-poor, white supremacist laws which held that the poor were at fault for their conditions and that aid should be given only sparingly. The laws also treated that aid as a loan that should be repaid. Those laws' effects can be felt over 100 years later in a child support program that keeps payments to recover the costs of the state's TCA program.

Paying all child support to the custodial parent has been shown to pull children out of poverty, improve their parents' co-parenting relationship, increase non-custodial parents' involvement and increase the frequency and amount of child support payments. The reason this bill is so important to CFUF is because 8,000 individuals owe more than \$120 million in child support arrears in our primary service area. One of our core programmatic offerings is the Baltimore Responsible Fatherhood Services program, where every month, fathers tell us the pain they experience due to child support cost recovery.

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According to the most recent Quadrennial Review of Child Support in Maryland, two-thirds of obligors and custodial parents have incomes below a living wage. Furthermore, 23% of obligors (40% in Baltimore City) have had their incomes imputed, a practice in which the courts say that even though an obligor is unemployed, they owe child support equivalent to having a full-time minimum wage. While this sounds reasonable in theory, in practice it assigns fictitious income to individuals who face a variety of structural barriers to full-time work, like substandard education or the long-term consequences of the carceral state.

Because the obligors' income never existed in the first place, their child support debt immediately starts to accrue. When an obligor's ex-partner is forced to receive TCA (because the majority of the time their income is too low), that debt is owed to the state. Thus, when the obligor is finally able to gather enough money to pay their child support, they face a terrible choice – help their children or pay the State of Maryland. As other advocates and impacted individuals have testified, TCA and other government benefits do not provide enough to meet a family's needs. While children might be fed and housed, they still need essentials like a warm coat or have every day kid desires like going to a ball game with their dad. The cost recovery program means a parent who has money they could be spending on their child has to pay the state or risk losing their drivers' license or spending time in jail.

Many of you are parents. I ask that you put yourselves in the shoes of the most vulnerable Marylanders and consider what it must feel like to face the choices the State of Maryland is making thousands of parents face a year. Cost recovery is wrong. It is bad policy, it is bad practice, and it does not align with Maryland's values.