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211 Maryland
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Energy Advocates
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Job Opportunities Task Force
Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Food Bank
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB 1402

Maryland Department of Health and Department of Human Services –
Public Benefits – Prevention of Waste, Fraud, and Abuse

House Appropriations and Health & Government Operations Committees
March 4, 2025

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) 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 a solution looking for a problem, as it's a myth 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.

HB 1402 is not an efficient use of state resources and personnel. 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.

MAP 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 individuals who receive public benefits lie about their income, hide assets, abuse the safety net, and improperly use their benefits. These narratives disproportionately harm women, individuals of color, and low-income families. Propagating these stereotypes often leads to individuals on safety-net programs being treated as lazy, untrustworthy, and even criminal. Moreover, these false narratives erode the public support for these vital programs, rendering them less effective by reducing their reach. Maryland should work to build public support for safety-net programs and our neighbors who need assistance – not undermine them.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to provide an unfavorable report on HB 1402.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.