

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1126

**Unemployment Insurance – Child Support Arrearage to Work Pilot Program –
Established**

TO: Hon. C.T. Wilson, Chair, and members of the House Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Consultant (Out for Justice)

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Out for Justice, Inc. (OFJ) is an organization comprised of individuals directly and indirectly impacted by the criminal legal system. It advocates for reforming policies and practices that adversely affect successful reintegration into society. We support House Bill 1126, which would increase employment access for unemployed individuals with child support arrears.

An Abell Foundation [report](#) found that across Maryland, 50 percent of noncustodial parents in the state child support program caseload were employed in 2017, and 43 percent of these earned minimum wages or less but owe an average of \$10,000 in unpaid arrearages. In Baltimore, where OFJ services most of its clients, 57 percent of noncustodial parents were employed, and 47 percent earned the minimum wages or less but owed an average of \$13,300 in unpaid arrearages. They will never pay down this debt, especially when the current law magnifies the issue by applying various enforcement tools.

When two months of missed child support payments, a non-custodial parent can suffer tax interceptions, driver's license suspension, wage garnishments (if they are working), revocation of passports, damage to their credit scores, loss of occupational licensing, and more. Worse, if one finds themselves unemployed, these effects can compound, widening the arrearage debt and dashing hopes of recovery for thousands of Marylanders.

House Bill 1165 seeks to address this by ensuring that if a parent finds themselves unemployed while owing child support, they can participate in a program coordinated by the Department of Labor, DHS, and DBM to immediately assist in finding a wide range of employment options. This is a wise option to strengthen the parent's economic resources, maintain a positive state-individual relationship with them, and ensure they do not fall behind in supporting their children. We urge a favorable report.