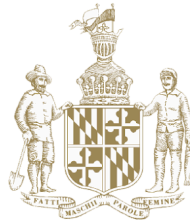


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HB1490

Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Good Cause and Adequate Reason Exceptions

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and esteemed members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB1490, which would prohibit the Department of Human Services (DHS) from denying an application for Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) due to noncooperation with child support if the individual has good cause to not seek a child support order. HB1490 would standardize the policies for what is known colloquially as the “good cause exceptions” to child support orders.

In 2024, 27,028 families received TCA benefits, a vital income support program that allows families to pay for necessities like rent, groceries, and medicine.¹ These families likely sought TCA as a lifeline to avoid falling deeper into poverty and to keep their families afloat. So, if their TCA application is denied, that can often wreak havoc on our most vulnerable families.

Procedurally, a TCA application requires a custodial guardian to seek a child support order before a family can receive TCA. DHS offers exemptions, however, to protect the family unit. These “good cause” exceptions apply when seeking a support order poses a threat of, such as but not limited to, inciting domestic violence, destroying fragile multi-generational family bonds (e.g., a grandmother’s relationship with her child while she raises her grandchildren), or complicating the status of refugees separated by international conflict.

DHS applies the good cause exception to applications on a case-by-case basis. This lack of standardization can result in either custodial parents abandoning their TCA application because they do not think it is safe or prudent to seek a child support order, or DHS having discretion to close a TCA case due to noncooperation with child support. DHS and advocates have also shared that they require applicants to pursue child support while waiting for a decision on whether the exception will be applied, potentially negating the underlying purpose for a family seeking the

¹ Life on Welfare: Temporary Cash Assistance Recipients and Families. (2024).
https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/life-on-welfare/Life-on-Welfare_-2024update.pdf

exception altogether. Alarming, TCA application denials due to noncooperation with child support increased from 5% in January 2024 to 21% in August 2024.²

HB1490 will standardize the good cause exception procedures so that the custodial guardian becomes the primary decisionmaker, not the agency, on whether it is safe to pursue a child support order when seeking TCA. HB1490 prohibits DHS from denying a TCA application, reducing TCA benefits, or terminating TCA benefits if an individual has good cause for noncooperation with child support. HB1490 makes it clear that DHS should proactively inform TCA applicants of their right to claim good cause or assist these individuals in preparing a written statement on a standardized form.

Maryland is not the first state to codify these processes; other states have codified good cause exceptions for child support requirements in their respective TCA programs. For example, in Massachusetts, good cause exceptions are granted if the applicant is a grandparent or non-parent relative raising the child.³ In Wyoming, a standardized screening form is used to identify domestic violence when granting a good cause exception.⁴ By passing HB 1490, Maryland would be among the first states to ensure custodial families are receiving necessary support without putting their family unit at risk.

Thank you for the committee’s consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 1490.

² Department of Legislative Services. (2026). N00100 - DHS - Family Investment Administration, Analysis of the FY 2027 Maryland Executive Budget.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/17xMIWCplxZoovURDV_5soEvhTpG9x0Jd/view?usp=drive_link

³ Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. (2025).

<https://www.masslegalhelp.org/public-benefits-ssi/tafdc/tafdc-child-support-rules>

⁴ Child Support Program Policy Manual - 20.4 - Good Cause. (2022).

<https://wychildsupportpolicymanual.wyo.gov/20-family-violence/20-4-good-cause>