

Informational Testimony for H.B. 1490: Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Good Cause and Adequate Reason Exceptions

March 11, 2026

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, is the cash assistance program that primarily serves single-parent families with children. Parents who apply for benefits must cooperate with the child support program, a requirement originally intended to recoup public costs for providing benefits. The federal government, however, allows states to waive this requirement through the [Family Violence Option](#) when a parent or child has experienced—or is at risk of—mental, emotional, or physical harm by the other parent. Maryland has elected this option since welfare reform in the mid-1990s, but recent evidence shows there is still more work to do to ensure families are protected.

The Family Welfare team at the School of Social Work recently completed a two-year, legislatively mandated [study](#) of Maryland's cash assistance program. Through interviews, focus groups, and surveys with staff and leadership across all 24 local departments of social services, we found that good cause waivers for child support were not consistently granted to families who qualified. In some cases, this included situations where the child was conceived under violent circumstances. Staff described distress at being required to make determinations that did not align with families' safety needs.

We also found that the process for determining good cause varied by jurisdiction. In one county, the Child Support Administration staff might make that decision; in a neighboring county, Family Investment staff might. When staff from the two agencies differed in their interpretation of policy, or when communication broke down between them, staff shared that the process became even more distressing for families and disrupted the receipt of benefits for which they would otherwise be eligible.

Since the release of our study, DHS has taken important steps to act on recommendations and improve program experiences for families, and they [reported](#) progress to DLS in October 2025. H.B. 1490 aligns with recommendations in the School of Social Work study, and builds on that work by clarifying, strengthening, and standardizing the good cause process. It will ultimately serve the best interests of some of Maryland's most vulnerable families.