



**Testimony in Support of HB 1490
Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Good Cause and
Adequate Reason Exceptions**

Presented to the House Appropriations Committee

March 11, 2026

When families go through a challenging period, income support programs are vital to helping them keep food on the table and a roof over their heads as they get back on their feet. Maryland's Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program helps families afford the basics when they are experiencing employment insecurity, health complications, homelessness, or other economic distress from family emergencies. However, too often families are unable to receive this much-needed assistance or face delays in receiving TCA because of administrative barriers.

House of Ruth Maryland strongly supports HB 1490 because it will reduce barriers to families getting the support they need by clarifying and strengthening existing regulations related to the requirement that TCA participants file a child support order.

House of Ruth Maryland serves over 10,000 individuals impacted by intimate partner violence each year, through emergency shelter, housing, therapy, legal services, and supportive programs. Every year we support families who arrive in crisis after fleeing abuse, often with no financial resources, very limited support systems, and urgent safety concerns.

TCA is Maryland's only cash assistance program for children and their caregivers, funded by the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. More than two-thirds of TCA recipients are children, and more than half of families receiving TCA have young children, age 5 or younger. Flexible cash payments are essential for families who often have little or no other income because they can cover essentials like rent, electricity, diapers, clothes, and school supplies that more restrictive programs like food assistance don't cover. TCA can play a critical role in helping families stabilize during the transition out of an abusive relationship.

Federal TANF regulations require that single parents applying for cash assistance file a child support order against the non-custodial parent. However, states may create and grant "good cause" exemptions to this requirement.

Maryland regulations offer limited good cause exemptions, but good cause is rarely granted in practice. Eligible families are denied TCA even though they have a valid reason to not pursue child support. This practice is a leading cause of TCA denials in Maryland and particularly harms Black women and children, people living with disabilities, and survivors of domestic violence and intimate partner violence.

HB 1490 will clarify and standardize the process for granting good cause to not cooperate with child support and reduce inequities by:

- Clarifying the Department of Social Services (DSS) is the agency that grants good cause (not the child support agency)
- Limiting DSS caseworker discretion to deny good cause
- Giving parents more choice and autonomy to determine whether pursuing child support is in their family's best interest
- Requiring DSS to notify families about good cause and how to obtain it

HB 1490 also codifies and expands Maryland's good cause exemptions to not cooperate with child support, including:

- Safety and domestic violence concerns
- Child conceived from incest or rape
- Pending adoption proceedings
- If filing for child support risks discouraging noncustodial parent from their relationship with their child, providing emotional or other support

Strengthening good cause exemptions will allow parents to make the decision that is in the best interest of their child, and their family's safety. It also will ultimately allow more eligible children and caregivers to receive essential income supports that reduce poverty and provide children with a stronger start in life. House of Ruth Maryland asks the committee to make a favorable report on HB 1490.

Sincerely,

House of Ruth Maryland

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