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**Senate Bill 771 - Human Services – Energy Assistance Programs –
Administration and Funding
Position: Support with Amendments**

Maryland Community Action Partnership (MCAP) supports SB771 and appreciates the sponsor's effort to strengthen the State's commitment to coordinated, accountable anti-poverty programming. The bill reflects a thoughtful attempt to bring structure, transparency, and strategic direction to an important funding stream. With several clarifying amendments, SB771 can both achieve its policy objectives and reinforce Maryland's existing Community Action infrastructure.

First, with respect to governance and fund distribution, MCAP recommends an amendment that explicitly recognizes designated Community Action Agencies (CAAs), as defined under the federal Community Services Block Grant Act, as primary community-based delivery partners within their established service areas. This would not limit the State's authority to administer the program, but it would ensure that implementation aligns with the long-standing tripartite governance structure and locally driven needs assessment process already embedded in federal law. Clear statutory language affirming coordination with, or pass-through to, designated CAAs where applicable would avoid duplication of administrative structures and maximize service impact.

Second, on program flexibility, MCAP recommends adding language that permits reasonable local discretion in the use of funds, consistent with statewide goals. Community Action Agencies operate in urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions with materially different economic conditions. Allowing funds to be used across core anti-poverty categories such as housing stabilization, utility assistance, workforce development, financial empowerment, and case management ensures that agencies can respond to documented community needs. An amendment clarifying that funds may be used broadly for anti-poverty and economic mobility purposes, rather than confined to a narrow set of line items, would strengthen implementation without undermining legislative intent.

Third, regarding administrative costs and compliance, MCAP recommends incorporating an explicit administrative allowance consistent with federal CSBG standards. CAAs already comply with extensive federal and state reporting, audit, and performance measurement requirements under the oversight of the State of Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development. To avoid creating an unfunded mandate, SB771 should authorize a reasonable percentage of funds for administration, oversight, and required reporting. In addition, aligning any new reporting requirements with existing ROMA or other federal performance frameworks would promote accountability while minimizing duplication.

Fourth, on eligibility and coordination, MCAP recommends clarifying that if additional community-based entities are eligible to receive funds under SB771, those entities must coordinate with the designated CAA serving the same geographic area. This amendment

would preserve collaborative service delivery and avoid fragmentation of limited resources. Maryland's Community Action network has decades of experience delivering integrated, wraparound services, and formal coordination language would leverage that infrastructure rather than inadvertently bypass it.

Finally, with respect to fiscal stability, MCAP encourages inclusion of language establishing a recurring funding source or clear appropriation intent to ensure program continuity. Agencies require predictable funding to retain staff, enter into service contracts, and plan multi-year strategies. Clarifying legislative intent for ongoing support would provide the stability necessary for meaningful outcomes.

With these amendments, SB771 can strengthen accountability and strategic alignment at the State level while preserving the local flexibility and governance model that have defined the Community Action framework for decades. MCAP stands ready to work with the sponsor and the Committee to refine the language so that the bill achieves its goals and enhances Maryland's capacity to reduce poverty and promote economic mobility statewide.

Submitted on behalf of MCAP by Carrington & Associates, LLC. Please contact Executive Director, Angela Martin, at amartin@maryland-cap.org for additional information.