



Testimony in Support of House Bill 1490 Family Investment Administration – Temporary Cash Assistance – Good Cause and Adequate Reason Exceptions

Senate Finance Committee

March 25, 2026

Maryland Family Network (MFN) strongly supports HB 1490, which prohibits the Department of Human Services (DHS) from denying an application for Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) - or reducing or terminating TCA benefits - if the TCA recipient has good cause for noncooperation with child support. MFN supports HB 1490 as amended by House, which incorporates input from DHS.

Maryland Family Network (MFN) has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and other vital supports for children and their families. We have been active in state and federal debates on policies that address the needs of working families and are strongly committed to ensuring that children and their caregivers have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

HB 1490 codifies what should be standard practice in Maryland, but alarmingly, is not.

Maryland's TCA program provides flexible cash benefits to low-income children and their families and is funded through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Federal TANF regulations require that custodial parents applying for TCA file a child support order against the non-custodial parent; however, states may create and grant "good cause" exemptions to this requirement. Common reasons to grant exemptions are when the custodial parent is a victim of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), the child was conceived through force, or the pursuit of child support is believed to put the child's safety at risk.

Unfortunately, Maryland does not grant good cause exemptions for child support equitably, frequently, or consistently. A recent study conducted by the University of Maryland School of Social Work determined that *"the good cause process for child support deviates considerably from policy [and] differences in processes across jurisdictions may be inequitable."*¹ It should not matter where someone applies for TCA: a good cause for an exemption is a good cause for an exemption, and the process should be identical across all local DSS offices.

Creating an enforceable policy for good cause exemptions to child support requirements will remove barriers to accessing TCA. At Maryland Family Network, we have heard stories from parents who struggled to access TCA because of the child support requirements. One parent, who was a victim of IPV, was afraid the non-custodial parent would find out their new address; DHS did not grant them a waiver for the child support requirement. Because the child support exemption policy has been applied inconsistently for years, we have also heard from families who never even applied for TCA, as they feared they would not be granted waivers to child

support. The data supports their fear: one of the leading causes of TCA application denial is for non-compliance with child support requirements.² Moving good cause exemption language into statute provides assurance to families that there is a standard practice the state will follow, and a better mechanism to hold DHS accountable when the state falls short of the standard.

Removing barriers to accessing TCA is better for children and better for Maryland’s economy.

Two-thirds of TCA recipients are children and creating barriers to accessing TCA – like inconsistently applying good cause exemptions – harms low-income children and further adds stress to families living in poverty. Establishing consistent and streamlined processes for granting good cause will allow more families to access TCA, which will increase their household income and provide children with a stronger start. Moreover, low-income parents will spend any increase in their household income at community businesses to meet their family’s basic needs, which strengthens the local economy.

Codifying good cause exemptions to the child support requirement improves access to TCA, promotes family economic stability, and strengthens Maryland communities. **Maryland Family Network respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 1490.**

Submitted by: Lisa Klingenmaier, Deputy Director of Public Policy

¹ University of Maryland School of Social Work. October 2024. *Maryland’s TANF Program: A Comprehensive Review*. Pg 128. [https://dhs.maryland.gov/documents/Data%20and%20Reports/FIA/Other/2024%20Comprehensive%20TCA%20Review%20\(H.B.%201041\).pdf](https://dhs.maryland.gov/documents/Data%20and%20Reports/FIA/Other/2024%20Comprehensive%20TCA%20Review%20(H.B.%201041).pdf)

² Department of Legislative Services. 2026. N00I00 Family Investment Administration Budget Analysis FY 2027. <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs/budgetfiscal/2027fy-budget-docs-operating-N00I00-DHS-Family-Investment.pdf>