



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1490

House Bill 1490 - Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Good Cause and Adequate Reason Exceptions

TO: Chair Ben Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee
FROM: Zachary Alberts, Director of Advocacy at the Center for Urban Families

The Center for Urban Families (CFUF), a West Baltimore workforce and family-strengthening community-based organization, advocates for legislation that strengthens urban communities by helping fathers and families achieve stability and economic success. In particular, we focus on improving the child support system so that it better supports low-income children and their parents.

Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) regulations require that single parents applying for Temporary Cash Assistance (often referred to colloquially as “welfare”) file a child support order against the non-custodial parent. However, states may create and grant “good cause” exemptions to this requirement. As you will hear in oral and written testimony, this practice is rarely used in Maryland. In 2024, only 7 cases in Maryland were opened with Good Cause determination; compare that to 264 in Connecticut, 266 in New Jersey, and 118 in Virginia in the same period.

In 2025, the Federal Administration for Children & Families [issued guidance](#) that:

[i]n striving for this commitment, we encourage all state agencies that administer Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child support programs to review cooperation and good cause policies for flexibilities within child support cooperation requirements for TANF applicants and recipients. Specifically, states can reexamine policies and practices related to child support program referrals of families participating in the TANF program. We believe that efforts to review and use flexibilities can help reduce child poverty and barriers to accessing help, as well as improve overall well-being for families.”

States have the flexibility to adopt additional exceptions to cooperation. We encourage states to consider additional recurring circumstances that might warrant an exception to cooperation, as well as to incorporate a flexible “best interests of the child” standard to allow for consideration of individual circumstances meriting an exception.

*Center for Urban Families, Inc. (CFUF)
2201 North Monroe Street
Baltimore, MD 21217
410 367 5691 P
410 367 4246 F
www.CFUF.org*



HB 1490 responds to this very recommendation, by codifying and expanding 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 alienating noncustodial parent from their child, or providing emotional or other support

As a whole, the child support system has been proven to be effective in reducing child poverty. However, in the last few years, Maryland has recognized that for those individuals with the intent to pay child support, but not the ability, the system can be harmful and counterproductive. Consequences of falling behind on your child support include credit bureau reporting, professional licenses suspension, driver's license suspension (if the obligor makes more than \$40k per year), and even incarceration. These are consequences that make it harder, not easier, to catch up.

The end of a romantic relationship does not mean parents are unable to co-parent effectively. While they may no longer be a couple, they operate as a team in raising their child(ren). In the actual world, support comes in many different forms, not just monetary. The non-custodial parent may be constrained financially, but the custodial parent recognizes there are a myriad of other ways that they contribute their share of the support, whether through childcare, transportation, emotional support, etc.

Yet, when the custodial parent needs the support of TCA, they are faced with a terrible choice – expose the non-custodial parent to a system that punishes individuals without financial means or forgo the cash assistance all together. I have had countless mothers tell me they chose to give up the cash assistance altogether, for reasons like “it wasn't enough money to do that to my child's father. He's not working right now, but I know he's trying, and he does all sorts of things for our kids.” Unlike mothers, the child support system recognizes no support but financial support. Unlike mothers, the child support system is not flexible in responding to the situation of low-income non-custodial parents as they go through fertile periods and as they go through barren periods.

The narrow scope of good cause exemptions forces the government into family dynamics too complex for any bureaucracy to navigate effectively. HB 1490 simply restores to low-income mothers the right every other mother has to decide how the non-custodial parent should contribute to their child's life.

We support the amendments that passed out of the House.

We urge the Committee to give House Bill 1490 a favorable report.