



HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY

FAVORABLE

HB 1490 – Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Good Cause and Adequate Reason Exceptions

**Senate Finance Committee
March 25, 2026**

Health Care for the Homeless supports HB 1490, which would remove inappropriate and harmful barriers to Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), a program that is a lifeline for low-income families. We also support the amendments that the House added.

While federal law requires one-parent households to apply for child support before receiving TCA, states have flexibility to create “good cause” exemptions from this requirement. Maryland regulations offer limited good cause exemptions, but good cause is rarely granted. Eligible families are denied TCA for noncooperation with child support, even though they have a valid reason to not pursue child support. This practice is a leading cause of TCA denials in Maryland.

This bill would add good cause exemptions for noncooperation of child support on account of, among other things:

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

Additionally, HB 1490 would standardize the process for granting a good cause exemption on account of an enumerated reason to not cooperate with child support and reduce inequities by:

- Clarifying that 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; and
- Requiring DSS to notify families about good cause and how to obtain it.

TCA is Maryland’s only cash assistance program low-income families with children. More than two-thirds of TCA recipients are children, and more than half of families receiving TCA have young children, age 5 or younger. Given that TCA is meant to support children, the ability for families and caregivers to access TCA has a particular impact on our Pediatric and Family Practice at Health Care for the Homeless. Below is an illustration of a situation that our pediatrics team routinely see:

Imagine that you find yourself and your children suddenly on the street – they have no place to go, no income, and no means of paying for a place to stay. After many weeks on a waiting list, you arrive at a shelter and are provided with a bed to sleep in a congregated room with many other families. You are informed that the shelter resources are limited and you will eventually need to pay for your own supplies like toilet paper, diapers, personal hygiene items, clothes, shoes and transportation. Or you're meeting with a case worker, at a shelter or community agency, to discuss housing options but since you don't have an income you cannot apply for any programs because of the application fees, security deposit and the required proof of income. Maybe you have a doctor's appointment for yourself or your child, but since you don't have an income, you do not have transportation to get to the appointment. Perhaps you need to call your children's school or schedule medical appointments but due to no income, you can't pay for a phone.

Sadly, we don't have to imagine because we see situations like this in our clinics often.

TCA is a starting point for families to move from homelessness to stability. Since most housing programs require clients to have an income, TCA enables families experiencing homelessness access to these programs so they can obtain stable housing. Current law and practice force clients into an impossible position where they are forced to choose between protecting the safety of their children by noncooperation with child support and accessing the income that allows them to pay for their family's basic needs.

Everyone has the right to have essential needs met such as food and shelter. For families with children experiencing homelessness, the stress from trying to obtain shelter, food, employment and personal items is enormous. Having access to a source of income while trying to get back on their feet is vital to the health of our families with children. Adding commonsense avenues for TCA eligibility as this bill contemplates, is a way to tangibly help support families who are already struggling to meet basic needs.

We urge a favorable report.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 11,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.

Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.

For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.