

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 559:
Family Investment Program - Temporary Cash Assistance - Funding

TO: Hon. Maggie McIntosh, Chair, and Members of the House Appropriations
Committee
FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate
DATE: February 18, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates for better jobs, skills training, and wages for low-income workers and job seekers in Maryland. JOTF supports House Bill 559 as a means of ensuring that low-wage workers across the state who regularly access public assistance receive a monthly amount that is enough to support them and their families.

Maryland cannot have a healthy, growing workforce without adequately funded assistance programs such as the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), also known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). TCA/TANF provides cash assistance to families with dependent children when available resources do not fully address the family's needs and ultimately prepares program participants for independence through work. The basic structure of TCA/TANF was built on the idea that it would support low-wage to no-wage workers and families who are actively seeking to lift themselves out of poverty but currently do not have enough funds to cover their monthly costs. As of July 1, 2017, every state's TANF benefits for a family of three with no other cash income were at or below sixty (60) percent of the poverty line with most states being below thirty (30) percent, as measured by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) 2017 poverty guidelines. Even more startling, in 2015 just 23 families received TANF benefits for every 100 poor families with children. In 2018, Maryland adjusted TANF benefits so that TANF and SNAP combined equal at least 61 percent of the state's Minimum Living Level. However, in order to keep up with the rising cost of living, more adequate funding is needed to respond to needs of qualifying families across the state who need support.

House Bill 559 seeks to address this issue by gradually increasing the funding for TCA, combined with the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), to equal 71% of the state's Minimum Living Level by 2026. In order to ensure that public assistance programs like TCA actually drive people out of poverty and into self-sufficiency, more robust funding that is comparable to the rising cost of living is imperative. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report of House Bill 559.