



DATE: March 3, 2020

BILL NUMBER: HB 1363

COMMITTEE: Appropriations

BILL TITLE: Human Services - Two-Generation Family Economic Security Commission

PRESENTED BY: Ascend at the Aspen Institute

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee thank you for considering legislation that seeks to determine the strongest strategies to increase the economic security of all Maryland families. Please accept this statement on behalf of Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

Ascend is a program of the Aspen Institute, which is based in Washington, DC. Our program was founded in 2011 as the national hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their families toward educational success, economic security, and health and well-being. We have spurred a new field and focus on two-generation (2Gen) approaches, which provide opportunities for and meet the needs of children and the adults in their lives to move toward intergenerational security. Research shows the impact that a parent's education, economic stability, and overall health has on a child's trajectory. Similarly, children's education and healthy development inspire parents and set the entire family on a more secure path. A 2Gen approach helps both generations make progress together and get us closer to fulfilling all parents' wishes that their children will do better than them.

According to 2018, Kids Count data, close to 30 percent of Maryland children live in households with low incomes. The vast majority of children with low incomes live with at least one parent employed full time, year round. Children who live with one or neither parent are more likely to be low income or poor than those who live with both parents. These statistics only tell one part of a broader story. As we know, families are resilient in the face of complex and interconnected challenges as they seek to climb the economic ladder. They deserve better than the current systems, which are often stacked against them. As a society, we have consistently denied families a voice in the design and implementation of programs and services meant for them, resulting in poor uptake and weak programs. In addition, research shows that engaging families can not only increase participation rates but also dramatically improve the efficacy of programs. Ascend embraces a commitment to racial equity and a gender lens and to ensuring that the experience of families informs our strategies.

After close to 10 years of strategic work in partnership with the committed leaders in the field, Ascend is proud to say that today an emphasis on meeting the needs of children and their families together is at



the center of some of the most relevant and respectful conversations, collaborations, and policy shifts focused on breaking the cycle of poverty. Ascend is proud to host the Aspen Ascend Fellowship program, which supports a diverse network of 80 leaders to make catalytic changes that will improve outcomes for families. Ascend Fellows include presidents of community colleges, leaders of nationally recognized community-based organizations, commissioners of state human services agencies, and philanthropic leaders. Joe Jones, who is the founder, president and CEO of the Center for Urban Families based in Baltimore, is an Ascend Fellow. Joe is a nationally recognized leader on policies and programs that support the role of fathers and he reflects the caliber of the leaders in the Ascend Fellowship program. We are also honored to host the Ascend Network, which is nearly 400 nonprofit organizations across the country committed to increasing the well-being of children and parents by taking a 2Gen approach. Through our work over the years, we have learned that taking a 2Gen approach requires strong leadership and culture change.

Maryland has become a national leader in the 2Gen field and it has been an honor over the last five years to, first, support the strong 2Gen work in communities being led by people like Duane Yoder and his staff at Garrett County Community Action Committee, and then begin supporting work within the Department of Human Services, first, under former Secretary Sam Malhotra and now working with Secretary Lourdes Padilla, and we have also been honored to participate in several of the meetings of the Two-Generation Family Economic Security Commission, chaired by Lt. Governor Rutherford.

We often highlight the work happening in Maryland as a model for other states and communities interested in the 2Gen approach. Maryland's Two-Generation Commission and MD THINK have been important sources of learning and innovation for the 2Gen field. In an effort to help share Maryland's 2Gen work and what you have learned over the last few years, Ascend has begun work on a case study similar to those we have done documenting the 2Gen work in Colorado and Tennessee. Maryland leaders have a lot to be proud of and it is refreshing to see a deeper commitment emerging to serving families holistically.

In addition to working with leaders in Maryland, Ascend supports ongoing 2Gen efforts in 11 other states and the District of Columbia and we track 2Gen work in seven other states. We can share that, in addition to the importance of leadership and culture change, successful 2Gen approaches are comprehensive, multisector, multifaceted and they take years. All voices must be represented – families, the business sector, community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, legislators and the executive branch.

We thank Delegate McKay for his leadership on this issue and we look forward to working with him, Secretary Padilla, the Lt. Governor and other leaders in Maryland working to ensure that families across the state have opportunities to increase their economic mobility and thrive from one generation to the next.

Thank you.