



**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF**

**HB 1043 – Family Investment Program – Eligibility, Work Experience, Community
Service and Reports – Alterations**

**House Appropriations Committee
March 10, 2022**

Health Care for the Homeless supports HB 1043, which uses the discretion and flexibility that federal rules give states to redesign the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) mandatory work program to limit the use of unpaid work for TCA recipients. Among other things, the bill will:

- Provide participants with marketable skills necessary to obtain employment in local high growth industries;
- Increase number of TCA participants who are hired for employment by unpaid "work experience" employers; and
- Limit use of unpaid "work experience" to one 90-day placement in a 3-year period

Currently, Maryland is one of very few states that uses unpaid "work experience" to meet the work requirements for TCA. Most states do not use this work category at all or in less than 2% of cases. Nationally, only 1.7% of work-eligible families are in this category. Unpaid "work experience" results in the lowest employment outcomes and wages compared to other TCA work activities.

TCA has been a critical safety-net for many of the clients we serve – individuals and families experiencing homelessness or housing instability. However, the way the TCA work requirement system is it is not a pathway to economic stability for the vast majority of recipients. In order to receive TCA, able-bodied adults in the household are required to participate in federally defined work activities. Although the original intent for the work requirement might have been for recipients to obtain employment after a short spell of receiving benefits, numerous studies show the workforce component of cash assistance does not result in long-term, stable employment.¹ In fact, data from the Life After Welfare report shows that five years after receiving TCA, 80% of Maryland families still live in poverty and, most disturbingly, almost 68% of former recipients are living in deep poverty.²

Reforming the work requirements of TCA, as HB 1043 contemplates, also helps dismantle historically racist policies. The federal TANF program – particularly the strict work requirement - is rooted in a history of racism that perpetuates false and harmful assumptions about families living in poverty.³ Far too often, TCA recipients are placed into temporary, unpaid work experience activities with little to no opportunity for employment after they have completed their placement. Recipients who are forced into these unpaid work experience placements have the most difficulty securing employment after TCA, and overall make the lowest earnings post-TCA.⁴

¹ Ideas 42. Work Requirements Don't Work. 2019. <http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ideas42-Work-Requirements-Paper.pdf>

² University of Maryland School of Social Work. Life After Welfare Series. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/familywelfare/safety-net-research/lifeafter-welfare-series/?&>

³ [Life After Welfare Series - University of Maryland, Baltimore \(umaryland.edu\)](https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/familywelfare/lifeafter-welfare-series/)

⁴ <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/work-supports-and-initiatives/workactivities.pdf?&>

If Maryland is going to reduce the number of households living in deep poverty and increase employment, the TCA work requirements must be improved. HB 1043 improves employment outcomes, improves wages, provides choice in employment, and skills and training needed to obtain that employment. This bill is a critical measure in improving the lives of people living in the deepest of poverty. As such, we urge a favorable report on HB 1043.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.