

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0470 - FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
Maryland People's Fund – Establishment

TO: Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and
members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Chris Apple
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In 2020 I had the opportunity to volunteer with Columbia Community Care, an organization that offers food and toiletries to Columbia families facing economic hardships. The lines were long and supplies disappeared quickly - it was clear evidence of just how many people the pandemic had affected. Poverty is a tragic fact of life in this country. In areas which have an “affluent” reputation, many people do not realize there are residents living in poverty. And when the unexpected strikes (like a pandemic) no one can see it coming, and support services are often scarce and hard to obtain. I think each of us is closer to economic hardship than we would like to admit.

Though Maryland's poverty rate is below the national average, this fact can create a false sense of security. As of 2020, the poverty rate in Maryland was about 9.4%, the second-lowest in the country¹. But that still leaves 553,000 Marylanders - including children - living below the poverty line. That is not a few people “slipping through the cracks;” it is a major failure on our part to provide care and resources to a large segment of the population. Our comparatively low poverty rate is not yet cause for celebration; we should be focusing on helping the half-million Marylanders whom the current system is failing.

The Maryland People's Fund would lay a financial groundwork for initiatives to address poverty in Maryland. Universal Basic Income is one such program. I am sure this Fund could also provide for other social programs that are aligned with the Sponsor's vision for this Fund.

Because the Fund money must be spent as directed by the state budget, I am concerned that there are no guidelines in this bill for how the money may be spent. I could foresee a day when legislators may be tempted to redirect some of this money to other pressing concerns - understandable, but I feel that would betray the purpose of the Fund. For this reason, I would feel better if the Sponsor amended the bill with requirements for how the money must be spent. That would help ensure the Fund is always used for its original intention, and does not become a “slush” fund for any emergencies that may arise.

¹ <https://wtop.com/maryland/2020/09/survey-shows-marylands-poverty-rates-and-the-racial-gap-beneath-them/>