



January 31, 2023

**House Appropriations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 168- Human Services-Temporary Cash Assistance-Calculation of Benefits

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB 168- Human Services- Temporary Cash Assistance- Calculation of Benefits. This bill requires the Department of Human Services to end the practice of reducing a Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) benefit, typically by \$60 a month, if the TCA recipient also receives housing assistance.

The Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program serves families with children who live in deep poverty. TCA, the cash assistance part of Maryland’s TANF program, was created as part of Welfare Reform in the mid-nineties. Families use TCA benefits to purchase food, transportation, utilities, and other basic needs.

BHSB supports HB 168 because decreasing a TCA household’s budget sends already vulnerable families into a deeper cycle of poverty. A \$60 reduction in TCA is the equivalent to families losing up to 10% of their possible maximum benefit. Most families that receive TCA and a housing subsidy are living in deep poverty. Studies show that children living in deep poverty are five times more likely to experience abuse and neglect and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which begins a lifelong struggle with negative mental, behavioral, and physical health outcomes.¹

Decreasing the TCA benefit means they will have a difficult time building the economic security necessary to transition off TCA permanently. Economic stability for families helps to mitigate children’s exposure to ACEs as it reduces parental stress by helping them with the resources needed to care for their children.

The CDC estimates lifetime costs associated with ACEs at approximately \$2 trillion nationwide, measures that prevent and address childhood trauma not only work to improve the public health of our state, but also have a high rate of return on investment and decrease healthcare, education, and welfare program costs in the long term. Maryland must continue to enact policies such as the one in HB 168 that prevent and mitigate ACEs. **As such, BHSB urges the House Appropriations Committee to support HB 168.**

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>