

House Bill 168
Human Services – Temporary Cash Assistance – Calculation of Benefits

House Appropriations Committee
January 31, 2023

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 168, which requires the Department of Human Services to end the practice of reducing a Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) benefit if the family also receives housing assistance.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors.

As one of the largest human service providers in Maryland, we work every day with families on TCA and see firsthand the challenges and difficulties they face attempting to build financial security on such a limited income. We house TCA recipients who are staying at our family homeless shelters in Anne Arundel and Harford Counties, we work with families on TCA in our Head Start programs in Baltimore City, Carroll County, and Harford County, and we assist TCA parents in securing work through our St. Edwards Workforce Development Program in Baltimore. We know that TCA is a vitally important safety net program, and at the same time, families struggle to obtain economic security on the maximum benefit. Thus, any reduction to TCA can be detrimental.

Families on TCA should not be financially penalized for accessing other critical supports, like housing assistance. We assist Marylanders to apply for benefits, and we strongly encourage families to access all the public benefits they are eligible for. It is a confounding policy choice for the state to count housing assistance as income for TCA, correspondingly reducing cash benefits for families who desperately need it. Decreasing TCA benefits reduces a family's already strained budget, making it even more difficult to purchase clothing, transportation, and diapers. Even if families are receiving a housing subsidy, they are living far below the federal poverty line. Reducing cash benefits for a low-income family because they receive another type of benefit is counterintuitive and further spirals families into economic instability.

Passing HB 168 will directly improve the economic security of Maryland families, and generate economic growth for the state as a whole. The majority of states in the country – and all of our neighboring states – do not count housing assistance as income for their cash benefit programs, recognizing the harm such policies have. Maryland should align ourselves with national best practices, and provide full benefits to all eligible families, regardless of other benefits they may receive.

On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 168.

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy