



Ashley Black, Staff Attorney
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, ext. 224
blacka@publicjustice.org

HB 168
Human Services – Temporary Cash Assistance – Calculation of Benefits
Hearing of The House Appropriations Committee
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SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC strongly supports HB 168**, which would require the Department of Human Services to eliminate its policy and practice of reducing Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) benefits for recipients who are also receiving housing assistance.

Thousands of families in Maryland receive TCA. Though most low-income working families earn too much to qualify for TCA, in fiscal year 2021, over 32,000 Marylanders were TCA recipients.¹ TCA is a block grant program that serves as a critical resource for children and their caretakers, enabling them to pay for shelter, clothing and other necessities.

Reducing TCA for households receiving housing assistance harms low-income families. As the cost of living rises, low-income working families are finding it nearly impossible to make ends meet. By law, the TCA benefit amount is only required to meet 61.25% of the Maryland Minimum Living Level when combined with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Furthermore, families who receive housing subsidies in addition to TCA have their TCA benefits reduced by an average of \$60/month. This approach to safety net services punishes families for needing financial help as housing subsidies cannot be used for certain essentials and thus, pushes them closer to experiencing a financial crisis. Further, this policy can have a disparate impact on low-income women of color as the average adult recipients of TCA identify as African American (68%) and/or women (88%).²

HB 168 dismantles a harmful practice and promotes economic security in Maryland families receiving TCA. If passed, HB 168 would make a positive change to Maryland's TCA program at a time where low-income families

¹ University of Maryland School of Social Work, *Temporary Cash Assistance: 2021 Jurisdictional Snapshots* (April 2022), https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/life-on-welfare/TCA-Snapshots_2021.pdf?&

² *Id.*
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are experiencing economic hardship and trying to stay afloat. HB 168 stands for the belief that no family should be penalized for accessing safety net services to survive. PJC's low-income client community is deeply impacted by changes to safety net services as many of our clients receive TCA, housing assistance and other public benefits. Removing this legal restriction would positively impact their ability to attain economic security. In fact, none of the states neighboring Maryland reduce TCA benefits for families receiving federal housing subsidies.

Economic stability and housing are key social determinants of health and essential for enabling all Marylanders to attain good health. For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 168**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 ext. 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.