



Senate Bill 26
Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children’s Health Program, and Social Services Programs – Eligibility and Enrollment

Senate Finance Committee
February 2, 2023

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports SB 26, which requires the Department of Human Services and Department of Health to streamline access to safety-net programs by auto-enrolling individuals in public benefits based on their eligibility for other safety-net programs.

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 low-income families and see firsthand the challenges and difficulties they face attempting to enroll in and sustain public benefits. We have caseworkers across our programs and across the state that help families and seniors apply for benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA). Cumbersome applications, missing paperwork, refusals to accept written applications, and materials sent in the wrong language are just some of the barriers our caseworkers see every day when helping families navigate safety-net program eligibility. We know that public benefits are vitally important in the effort to assist low-income seniors and families meet their basic needs, but enrolling and maintaining benefits is a herculean effort.

Passing SB 26 will directly improve the economic security of low-income Marylanders, and generate economic growth for the state as a whole. Automatically enrolling Marylanders in public benefits they are eligible for based on their eligibility for similar programs will reduce the burdensome paperwork and travel often required to apply for benefits. Automating public benefit eligibility will increase access to reliable food, health care, and utilities for the families we work with, building their overall economic security. Improving access to public benefits also benefits our state’s local economy and public health: healthy families with secure incomes go into their local communities and spend their resources on clothes, food, and other basic necessities. Categorical eligibility – like proposed in SB 26 – is a national best practice that Maryland should adopt in the effort to ensure low-income seniors and families receive all of the public benefits they are eligible for.

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 SB 26.

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy