



Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

Stacey Jefferson, Co-Chair
P: 410-637-1900 ext 8578
C: 443-813-9231
E: stacey.jefferson@bhsbaltimore.org

Julia Gross, Co-Chair
P: 410-528-0021x6029
E: jgross@mdhungersolutions.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT OF HB 612

Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families (RELIEF) Act

*House Ways and Means and Economic Matters Committees
February 4, 2021*

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports – with amendments – HB 612, which is the Administration's emergency bill to address the COVID-19 pandemic and includes important provisions such as relief payments to low-income families who claim the Earned Income Tax Credit. While we agree with many of the provisions, we believe that many struggling groups of low-income Marylanders were left out of the original bill, and thus **we strongly advocate for the House to adopt the Senate Recovery Now Amendments.**

We appreciate the work and focus of the Maryland General Assembly and the Governor's Administration in providing needed relief to Marylanders as we all navigate the impact of the pandemic. Before the pandemic, one in ten Marylanders were living at or below the Federal Poverty Line, and the pandemic has only exacerbated the struggles of low-income individuals and families. Predictably, the need for safety-net programs in our state has exploded since March, and has put a spotlight on the entrenched gaps, barriers, and inequities that have long existed in our programs and policies to address and end poverty, especially for Black and Brown communities that have disproportionately borne the brunt of the pandemic due to systemic racism and historic disinvestment. We appreciate the work of the Administration to create the RELIEF Act; however, we believe the bill is made stronger and more equitable by the addition of the Senate Recovery Now Amendments.

In particular, we urge the committee to adopt the following provisions in the Senate Recovery Now Amendments:

- **Increasing and restoring the Temporary Disability Assistance Program (N00G00.08)** The Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP) is a critical safety-net program that provides monthly cash assistance to single adults with no other source of income who have been certified as unable to work due to disability. While the Administration has provided increase benefits for many safety-net programs, TDAP was left out. In order to create more equity between safety-net programs, MAP request the committee to adopt the \$22 million Senate Amendment that would increase TDAP by \$100/month until June 2021, and that would restore benefits to individuals who unfairly lost their TDAP when they were unable to schedule medical certification appointments due to COVID.
- **Arrearage Assistance through the Office of Home Energy Programs (N00I00.06).** The \$9 million set aside for OHEP would help families struggling with utility payments, providing much needed arrearage assistance, which will allow 10,800 families to comfortably stay in their homes.
- **Housing and legal assistance to address the eviction crisis (S00A25.05 and C00A00.06).** The pandemic has highlighted the dire lack of affordable housing in Maryland, and struggling households are burdened with past due rent payments and eviction proceedings. The \$25 million for rental assistance will erase the housing debt of 5,000 households, and provide emergency housing assistance for 5,555 households. Moreover, the \$3 million set aside for eviction assistance will help to ensure households have legal assistance and representation as they face eviction court proceedings.

- **Funding for Crisis Services and Behavioral Health Treatment (M00L01.02).** As we collectively and individually process the trauma we are enduring by living through a worldwide pandemic, we know that many Marylanders are struggling with their behavioral health. We appreciate the funding that is set aside in the amendments for the funding of crisis services – both mobile and standalone – for the next six months. We do have concerns with how quickly providers can get out this funding in six months – that is a herculean endeavor – so more time to get the programs and services operational would be helpful, nevertheless, the funding is important and appreciated.

In addition, we request the committee amend the RELIEF Act to provide relief payments to all Maryland residents who meet the Maryland EITC income criteria. The legislation, as written, stipulates that State economic impact payments will be provided to taxpayers that received the State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in accordance with § 10–704 of the Tax – General Article. Undocumented immigrants and other Marylanders who do not have Social Security numbers - despite working, filing, and paying taxes - are not eligible for the EITC and are currently ineligible to receive this relief. Immigrants and undocumented individuals are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, while often simultaneously working - without any additional support - in essential professions to keep Maryland safe and operating. Low-income individuals and families utilizing an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to file taxes should be included in our State’s pandemic relief efforts, as the harmful impact of this massive public health crisis does not differentiate between Marylanders with documented status and those without.

For these reasons, MAP strongly urges a favorable with amendments report on HB 612 and appreciates your consideration.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.