



Community Action Board's Testimony to the Montgomery County Delegation

Joint House and Senate Priorities Hearing

November 18, 2024

Good evening. My name is Dr. Jeffery Johnson and I am the Chair of the Montgomery County Community Action Board, which advocates on behalf of the County's economically disadvantaged community members and serves as the governing body for the Community Action Agency and the County's Head Start program. Thank you for the opportunity to share our board's statewide priorities.

I want to start by thanking the delegation for continuing to support policies that will help our neighbors struggling to meet the Self-Sufficiency Standard. Our board supported several bills during the last session and we were excited to see key legislation like the ENOUGH Act and the Access to Care Act, along with bills to expand access to the EITC and food security programs, pass and be signed into law. Thank you for championing so many important policies and for continuing to advocate for the needs of Montgomery County residents.

Community Action Anti-Poverty Fund

Once again, our first priority this year is to create a Community Action Anti-Poverty Fund. We join our state association, the Maryland Community Action Partnership, and the seventeen Maryland Community Action Agencies that MCAP includes, in requesting permanent funding in the state budget. This Fund would provide state-level support by matching the federal funds we currently receive through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). A Community Action

Anti-Poverty Fund is critical to our work, especially with CSBG funds stagnant and with costs rising everywhere.

As you may know, in many parts of Maryland, Community Action Agencies are the only programs addressing the fundamental needs of residents. According to the 2022 MCAP Factsheet, which is included with this testimony, Community Action Agencies served 185,548 individuals, connecting people with housing, food and nutrition programs, and other critical services. Our own Montgomery County Community Action Agency works tirelessly with a small team to offer exceptional programs and services. These include the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, which served 2,246 households, with a free tax impact of \$8.6 million last year; the Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center, which connects 200 – 300 residents with critical services each month, and our Navigation Team, which also serves 200 – 300 residents each month at different sites. Our own board also oversees a free advocacy training program, the Community Advocacy Institute, and I want to take a moment to thank Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins and Delegate Julie Palakovich Carr for participating in our first workshop earlier this month.

Our agency's small team is stretched thin and we are now in the process of having to discontinue certain broker positions. We, along with all Maryland Community Action Agencies, could use additional state-level funding to expand our services and support our staff. We ask the delegation to support the Community Action Anti-Poverty Fund.

2-Gen/Whole Family Approach

Our second priority, which is funding for 2-Gen/Whole Family services, has also been a key advocacy issue for several years. What is new this year was the elimination of 2-Gen/Whole Family Approach funding in the state's FY25 budget. We are asking the delegation to support reinstating the funds for next year and beyond. The 2-Gen/Whole Family approach is considered a best practice among human services programs. It entails reducing barriers for families and addressing the needs of an entire household, rather than siloing services so that people must access services at numerous sites for every member of their household. Our

agency has been utilizing this approach for decades, both at the TESS Community Action Center, and through the Head Start program, for which the agency is the grantee. Most recently, 2-Gen funds have supported the Opportunity Coach at our TESS Center. The Opportunity Coach provides case management and coaching for 15 families in the program and oversees the agency's diaper distribution program, distributing 200 diapers each month for 35 families. 2-Gen funding is critical for our agency and for all Community Action Agencies in the state, all of whom have utilized these funds to better serve community members. We understand that the General Assembly is working to reinstate these funds and we ask the delegation to continue to champion this issue.

Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit

Our next priority is the expansion of the state Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. Our agency's VITA program helps residents receive all of the credits for which they are eligible. These credits contribute to larger refunds, which allow households to pay their rent, pay for child care, and pay for other expenses, along with putting money in savings. Last year alone, the VITA program connected residents with \$2,966,728 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$864,207 in Child Tax Credits. These credits are especially significant in an area like Montgomery County where the cost of living is so high. The Self-Sufficiency Standard for a family of three with two adults, one school-age child, and one preschooler is \$116,864 - over four and a half times the Federal Poverty Guidelines.¹ We are asking for the delegation's continued support for expanding the state EITC to single adults without dependents and enhancing the state's Child Tax Credit so that it can reach more families.

Early Childhood Education

Finally, as the governing body for the County's Head Start Program, along with the Head Start Parent Policy Council, our board is closely monitoring the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and developments in Early Care and Education here in Montgomery County. We continue to advocate for a mixed delivery system where private child care providers can access Blueprint

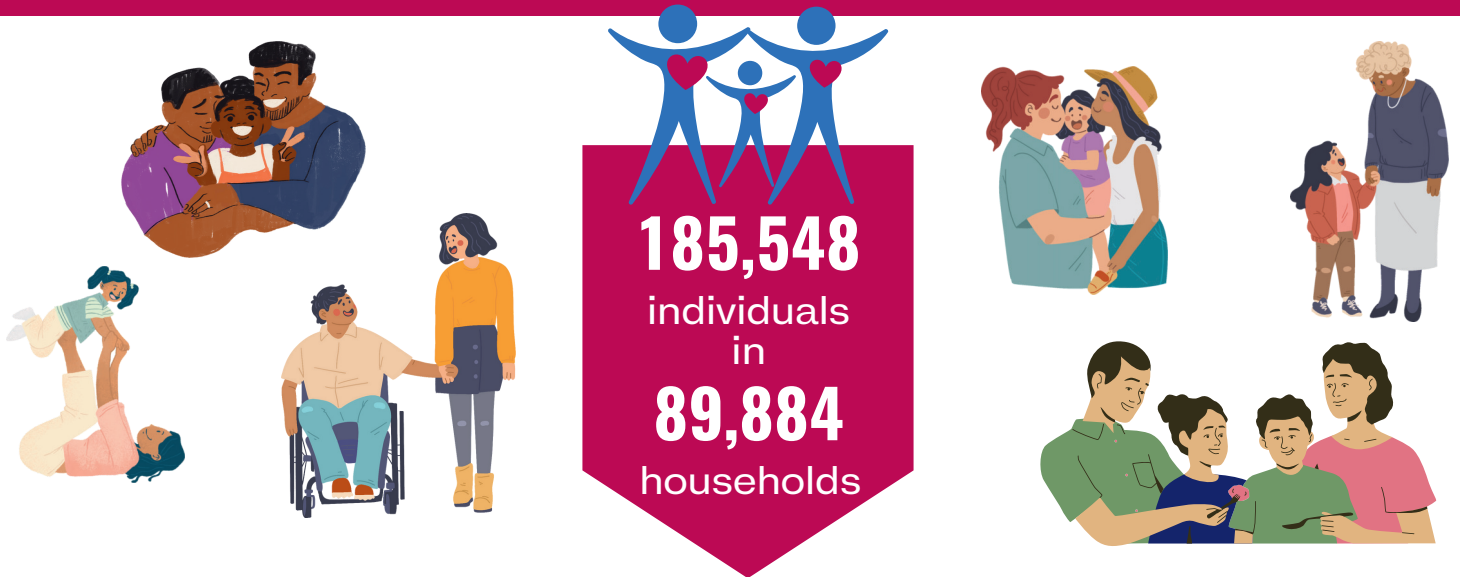
¹ Selfsufficiencystandard.org

funds. For this to happen, we ask the delegation to support policies that expand certification options for private child care providers and reduce barriers such as wage disparities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our board's priorities. We look forward to working with the delegation throughout the legislative session.

2022 MARYLAND FACT SHEET

In 2022, Community Action Agencies in MD Served:



Housing

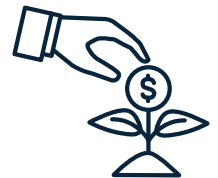
112,179

People Received
Housing & Utility
Education & Assistance

Income & Assets

14,561

People Received Financial
Counseling & Tax
Preparation Services



Case Management

51,109

People Received
Holistic Case
Management Services

Nutrition Services

225,114

Meals & Food Bags
were distributed



Health

22,067

People Received Health
& Social/Behavioral
Development Services

Transportation

36,489

People Received
Transportation
Services



The numbers tell a portion of the story of the outstanding work of the 17 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) that collectively serve every county in Maryland. Behind these numbers are the faces of families working their way to stability, economic security, and safety in our communities.

**This data was based off Module 4 of the Maryland State CSBG 2022 Report.*

