



Maryland Community Action Anti-Poverty Fund – Legislative Priorities 2025

INTRODUCTION

1. About MCAP

The Maryland Community Action Partnership (“MCAP”) was established in 1986. The non-profit, multi-regional association advocates on behalf of Community Action Agencies (“CAAs”) and partnering organizations that serve individuals and families with low incomes who reside in Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia to ensure their voices are heard at the local, state, and Federal levels. Of MCAP’s 19 member CAAs in MD, DC, and DE – Maryland’s 17 agencies serve over 207,000 Marylanders with low income. CAAs are Maryland’s federally-designated anti-poverty agencies.

2. Purposes of MCAP Network of Member Agencies

- a. Serving low-income individuals and families with critical needs, including:
 - children’s services
 - senior services
 - affordable housing and homelessness
 - energy and emergency assistance
 - food and nutrition
 - employment and education services
 - health services
 - transportation
 - tax and financial planning
- b. MCAP members are committed to building strategic pathways tailored for each family and the unique needs of each community.

ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK SUPPORT

MCAP ask:

1. Support Chairman Guzzone’s upcoming legislation, Senate Bill 666, to create an Anti-Poverty Fund in the state budget, which will be distributed to MCAP member agencies.
2. Support to address the increasing caseloads of the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) without corresponding increases in allocations for agencies that administer the program.
3. Support for CAAs to be listed as required partners in statewide anti-poverty and community development initiatives, rather than as optional partners.
4. ***Tentative – more information to come*** Support the ENOUGH Act and an amendment to include a dedicated funding line item for Community Action Agencies (CAAs) to serve as lead agencies in implementation.

Legislative Priorities:

1. Support Chairman Guzzone’s upcoming legislation to establish an Anti-Poverty Fund in the state budget. This fund will match federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds, enhancing the capacity of CAAs to provide critical anti-poverty services. A commitment to the Community Action Anti-Poverty Fund is a commitment to economic mobility and support for economic opportunity for Marylanders with low income. The Community Action Fund supports the work of Community Action Agencies across Maryland to offer competitive wages, meet the rising demand for services, and revitalize communities through housing and community development. Furthermore, the Maryland Community Action Anti-Poverty fund would allow CAA’s to aggressively assist with Governor Moore’s stated

goal of ending child poverty by organizing a range of services related to the needs of low-income families and individuals.

Competitive Wage: The Community Action Anti-Poverty Fund will provide critical funding for Agencies to offer competitive wages to the essential workers who provide services that move families out of poverty and develop pathways to economic mobility. The Maryland Self Sufficiency report conducted in 2023 shows that it is not uncommon to see that many employees do not earn wages adequate to meet their families' basic needs without public or private assistance. ([Click here to view Maryland's 2023 Self-Sufficiency Calculator](#)). The Community Action Anti-poverty Fund will help Agencies attract and retain qualified staff to provide quality services to clients. Secondly, it will help reduce staff turnover rates, which can be costly for the agency and disruptive for clients. Third, it will help ensure that staff are motivated and committed to their work, leading to better outcomes for clients.

Increased Demand for Services: Between 2018 and 2021, Maryland's 17 Community Action Agencies collectively served over 850,000 people and have experienced a staggering 84% increase in demand for services. This increased demand was initially driven by the pandemic and has not abated ([Learn more here](#)). While the increased federal and state COVID-related funding has been expended, the dramatically increased need remains, making it impossible to meet the needs of our communities with pre-pandemic funding levels. Due to decreased funding and much more stringent eligibility thresholds, Community Action Agencies are finding themselves faced with the impossible challenge of turning away individuals and families in desperate need of support.

Housing and Community Development: Adequate housing is the hallmark of a thriving community, a basic human need, and a fundamental building block for creating healthy communities, promoting social and economic mobility, and reducing poverty. The Community Action Anti-Poverty fund will support housing initiatives by creating space for CAAs to innovate using strategies including revitalization (i.e., preserving, producing, and managing affordable housing units), people-based strategies focused on financial stability and health, and community systems such as economic development and access to resources and opportunities that promote economic mobility.

2. Support to address increasing caseloads of the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP).

Energy assistance is a key component in addressing poverty for Maryland families, and CAAs have been faced with dramatically increased caseloads for this program without a corresponding increase in allocations. **MCAP is advocating for state funding to help agencies meet the rising demand for energy assistance, ensuring that eligible families can continue to receive support.** This funding is critical to maintaining the effectiveness of OHEP as a vital service for Marylanders with low income.

3. Support for Community Action Agencies to be listed as required partners in statewide anti-poverty initiatives.

The Community Action Network celebrated 60 years of anti-poverty work in 2024, and with 60 years of experience, Community Action Agencies are leaders in planning and executing community-based anti-poverty and community development initiatives. A cornerstone of Community Action is listening to and amplifying community voices, as CAAs services and missions are driven entirely by the unique needs of the communities they serve. **The inclusion of CAAs in planning and executing anti-poverty and community development initiatives is critical to achieving state objectives efficiently and effectively.**

4. *Tentative – more information to come* Amend the ENOUGH Act to include a dedicated funding line item for Community Action Agencies.

CAAs played a significant role in the passage of the ENOUGH Act during the 2024 legislative session. As the Federally designated anti-poverty agencies in MD, CAAs bring efficiency, transparency, and accountability, managing Federal, State, and Local funds effectively. **MCAP is advocating for an amendment to the ENOUGH Act for a percentage of the Act's funds to be earmarked for CAAs as lead agencies in implementation.** CAAs have a proven capacity to deliver results while maintaining fiscal responsibility, making them ideal partners in the implementation of the ENOUGH Act.