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One-Stop Shops Can Help Struggling Maryland Families Access Benefits *Maryland Can Build on Successful Models to Quickly Implement Needed Changes*

Executive Summary

Maryland can help struggling families by creating one-stop shops where families can apply for multiple benefits. There are existing models upon which the State can build, in other states and in Maryland. It is particularly important that two new state efforts—one for health and the other for family work supports like food stamps—be coordinated.

Background

Many Maryland families have trouble accessing supportive services for which they are eligible. For example, four out of every ten eligible Marylanders are not receiving food stamps.¹ Many eligible families do not apply for programs like food stamps or Medicaid because they are discouraged by long and duplicative application processes. Families often must go to multiple locations, answer the same questions repeatedly and provide documents over and over for each application—and then do it all over again six or 12 months later to maintain eligibility.

Maryland has taken an important step to simplify the process by creating an online application system, the Service Access and Information Link (SAIL). However, families still often have to go to several offices to complete their applications. In addition, SAIL only covers certain programs.

The current application technology makes caseworkers' jobs even more difficult. Caseworkers enter most information by hand, and the systems are difficult to master. For example, the State has an antiquated DOS-based system for processing medical claims that was implemented in 1981. Several recent benefit improvements have been unable to move forward because of reprogramming costs.

This brief examines one best practice to improve access to benefits like food stamps—a one-stop shop.

One-Stop Shops: Critical Elements

A one-stop shop is a site where a family can apply for multiple public benefits with one set of

documents and a computer system that minimizes the need for duplicative information. There are five typical one-stop shop components:

- Single point of entry – There is “no wrong door” for families to access services. Any point of entry can help a family access benefits and families will not be turned away for entering through the wrong program.
- Co-location – Multiple benefit applications and services are available in a single physical location.
- Comprehensive family assessment – All family members are screened for benefits to fully assess family needs and connect families with appropriate supports.
- Joint case planning – In some one-stop shops, families have a single case plan and caseworker for all programs, or at least coordination between different caseworkers.
- Sense of partnership – One-stop shops move away from a fragmented service delivery approach and provide more integrated services.²

Successful Models

Many states and localities have successful one-stop shops in place that can serve as models for Maryland.

Louisiana opened its first “Neighborhood Places” in June on two school campuses. Based on a model from Kentucky, the state recently passed legislation mandating the Departments of Social Services, Education, Health and Hospitals, the Louisiana Workforce Commission and the Office of Juvenile Justice to work together with communities to serve families from a single location. Core services in every Neighborhood Place include housing assistance, food stamps, work-force development, Medicaid and the state’s child health insurance program. Sites also have the option to incorporate other services like English as a Second Language classes and family planning.

² Hutson, Rutledge, Center for Law and Social Policy, *Providing Comprehensive, Integrated Social Services to Vulnerable Children and Families: Are There Legal Barriers at the Federal Level to Moving Forward* (2004).

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2006* (Nov. 2008).



Single Stop New York has 40 community sites serving 26,000 poor New York City residents annually. At each site, clients can receive help applying for benefits, legal services, tax help, job search resources and social worker supports. The Robin Hood Foundation is a major supporter of the initiative. Its \$12 million annual investment yields benefits worth an estimated \$224 million to the sites' visitors. The initiative has been so successful that a national replication effort is underway.

There are also several Maryland initiatives already underway that could serve as models and/or partners for one-stop shop efforts.

Seedco's EarnBenefits program in Baltimore is the closest approximation to a one-stop shop in Maryland. Trained counselors at community-based organizations screen clients for benefit eligibility, help them apply for multiple benefits simultaneously and provide long-term support to ensure receipt, successful recertification, and access to different benefits as income changes. Unfortunately, Seedco counselors are unable to access state databases showing the application status of their clients, limiting counselors' ability to track their client's application status and assist with follow-ups.

The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with local municipalities and community organizations, recently opened two Neighborhood Service Centers, staffed by trained "community connectors." The centers are co-located with nonprofit providers to bring emergency assistance to areas hit hardest by the economic crisis. Community connectors help clients complete applications for a wide range of programs, identify needed documentation and provide referrals.

The Maryland Office of Aging, in conjunction with County Commissions on Aging, has created Maryland Access Points. Access Points are a single point-of-entry for services for county residents aged 50 and older and disabled adults. Access Points provide case management services, intake for senior care and disability programs, referrals to subsidy programs, legal screenings and advice, and referrals.

The State also has One-Stop Career Centers in each county that help link job seekers and businesses. Funded by the Federal Workforce Investment Act, these centers bring together several agencies to

provide career counseling, job search resources, unemployment insurance information, training opportunities and services for veterans.

The Department of Human Resources is in the process of creating a Customer Service Center in Baltimore City that has the potential to serve as a one-stop shop.

Finally, Howard and Anne Arundel Counties are piloting a web-based computer system originally developed in California. The One-E-App system simplifies the application process through the use of more sophisticated, but easier to understand computer interfaces. Howard County calls the program Health-E-Link and currently only uses it for Department of Health and Mental Hygiene programs. A state-wide and government-wide expansion could help many more Marylanders access benefits.

The Maryland Opportunity

The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene recently received a special federal grant of nearly \$1 million to reduce barriers to the enrollment of children in health insurance. A key strategy will be expansion of the One-E-App model statewide. A stakeholders group is providing guidance.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources has formed a one-stop shop work group, with agency officials, advocates and providers. The Department is using federal stimulus money for technology to scan documents so that applicants only have to submit that once for multiple programs.

Governor Martin O'Malley has made improving food stamp utilization a priority. One significant barrier is the inability to handle the flood of new applicants because of the economic situation. Processing delays sparked a recent lawsuit.

With the availability of new federal funding, the interest of the Governor, the need to handle more applicants with limited resources and the pressure of litigation, there is a unique opportunity to implement a one-stop shop model in Maryland.

Maryland can best seize this opportunity by learning from successful programs and building upon existing efforts. The Departments of Human Resources and Health and Mental Hygiene can also coordinate their reforms so that families can apply for health and food stamps at the same time.