



## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

**HB 694 – Governor’s Office for Children – Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024)**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President, League of Women Voters of Maryland**

**DATE: February 28, 2024**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League believes that some of the goals of social policy should be to reduce poverty among Marylanders, and to secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. The League believes that meeting the needs of children should be one of the highest priorities of government, as should be the provision of effective services for children – emphasizing collaborative, community based, accessible services that focus on early intervention.

According to the 2024 Social Demographics Report of the Maryland Family Network, in 2022, 11.8% of Maryland children under 18 were living in poverty. In that same year, data show that 6.2% of Maryland families were in poverty, but almost double that, 12.3%, of Maryland families with children under 5 were living in poverty. Child poverty is one of the primary social determinants of health, which are factors that have been identified as predictors of success in adult life. It is also considered an Adverse Childhood Experience; research focusing on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) show that the fewer ACES an individual experiences, the more likely they are to be successful in school, have greater lifetime earnings, and lead healthier adult lives.

The ENOUGH Act of 2024 provides for the establishment of the Governor’s Office for Children, to be led by the Special Secretary of the Governor’s Office for Children, for the purpose of establishing the ENOUGH grant program. This grant program would target communities with disproportionately high numbers of children in poverty. Localities that meet this threshold can then apply for up to \$10 million in grant funding to establish a partnership of local stakeholders that will develop programs and services to effectively reduce child poverty and provide for the building of individual and community protective factors and increase the rate of success of children and families in that locality. Partnerships must be collaborative, and include one community-based non-profit, one local government entity, and one public school. They can also include health care providers, law enforcement, local businesses, parent organizations, faith based organizations, and others.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, representing over 1,000 concerned Maryland citizens, strongly urges a favorable report on HB694.