



January 2025

Message from the Chair

Greetings Everyone and a Happy New Year. As we step into 2025, MASSB is eager to continue our mission of addressing poverty and building inclusive, thriving communities. January marks National Poverty Awareness Month, a meaningful time to reflect on the challenges faced by vulnerable populations and to recognize the pivotal role of volunteering in advancing our shared mission. As we continue our focus, we are also embarking on another year of exciting opportunities for collaboration and growth. Our upcoming Winter Conference will provide a valuable platform for connecting, sharing insights, and learning from one another as we collectively strengthen our impact. Additionally, our MASSB website is designed to be a vital resource for highlighting local board activities and events. As we embark on 2025, we encourage you to stay involved, share your ideas, and make use of the many opportunities to engage with MASSB. Together, we can make this year one of meaningful progress and impactful change.



Best,
Tony

Community Connection

Elizabeth Etouke
Member, Frederick County Advisory Board
Graduate/Doctoral Student



We are grateful to Elizabeth Etouke for sharing her inspirational story during National Poverty in America Awareness Month. Elizabeth beautifully describes her journey as a single mother and immigrant from Cameroon to doctoral student in her graduation speech linked below. Read on to learn how her lived experience will guide her doctoral thesis and beyond. Congratulations, Elizabeth, on your achievements and good luck as you continue to pursue your dreams!

Good morning and Happy New Year 2025! My name is Elizabeth Etouke, and I am pursuing a doctorate in public administration while working as a Data Analyst for the State of Maryland. My personal experiences with financial instability, especially as a single mother relying on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), have profoundly shaped my passion for public administration. Public programs became a lifeline for my family and highlighted the importance of effective public service, motivating me to improve such programs.

As a former participant in the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program, I faced challenges balancing work with the pursuit of a meaningful education. This experience will guide my doctoral thesis on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. I aim to address the question:

"How can TANF be restructured to better support economic mobility for single-parent households while reducing dependency on government aid?"

Key focus areas will include: revising work requirements to prioritize education and skills training; expanding access to affordable childcare and healthcare; and creating pathways to stable, high-paying jobs. My research will highlight and evaluate the barriers faced by single-parent households through qualitative interviews or surveys while providing areas of improvement to alleviate these barriers and facilitate better program outcomes. The second question in my research will be:

"What innovative policy changes could enhance the effectiveness of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in addressing intergenerational poverty?"

This question addresses the issue of poverty that spans generations and highlights TANF's potential role in breaking the cycle. Key focus areas will include integrating TANF with educational initiatives for parents and children, developing mentorship and family counseling programs, and incorporating mental health services. I am interested in implementing pilot programs to evaluate the long-term outcomes of TANF recipients through longitudinal studies.

One aspect of my dissertation is the contrast between the Social Security program for seniors and the TANF program. Social security is often seen as more dignified, while TANF's name suggests poverty and lacks aspiration. I believe renaming it to something like "Temporary Assistance for Rising Families" could improve its perception.

Hopefully, after this dissertation, a national reform of the TANF program could be initiated, and I would hope to be part of that implementation.

For more information about my journey, you may access my 2024 graduation speech through this link. [Elizabeth Etouke 2024 Graduation Speech](#).

Quick Tip!

The January board meeting is a great time to set the stage for the year's activities. Checklists are good planning and communication tools for your board. [Click here](#) for checklists that can be adapted for your board meetings, and developing your strategic plans and recruitment plans. Need help getting started? E-mail massbtrustee@gmail.com with your questions or to request a working session with one of our experienced members. Reasonable funding for training offered by other organizations such as Maryland Nonprofits is also available.

The MASSB Team

We are excited to be starting the year with new talent on our leadership team. The Maryland Association of Social Services Boards (MASSB) will be led by officers elected during our Annual Conference: Melissa Teitelbaum (President), Dr. Renita Alexander (Vice President), and Dr. Shawn Ashworth (Secretary). The MASSB Foundation is overseen by a team of Trustees led by Chair, Dr. Tony Wohlers. While the two organizations have distinct responsibilities, we work together to serve our membership, the local DSS Advisory Boards. Please visit our website for biographies of the [Officers](#) and [Trustees](#).

During 2025, we will continue to focus our efforts on growing the MASSB organization and supporting the local boards, as outlined below. Please e-mail us with your questions and suggestions. We are here to serve you!

 <p>ORGANIZATION SUSTAINMENT AND GROWTH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicit board members internally and externally to serve on the MASSB executive team. Continue strengthening investment strategy and implement accordingly. 	 <p>BOARD SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize the annual MASSB conference designed to advance information sharing and best practices to address the needs of vulnerable populations. Organize the annual Winter Conference to share MASSB and state legislative priorities. Organize regular MASSB Leadership and Community Meetings to engage DHS Directors and Advisory Board Members. Disseminate the monthly MASSB Minute to share relevant information and keep DHS Directors and Advisory Board Members engaged
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The MASSB Foundation

The MASSB Foundation was formed in 2007 to enable fundraising by Department of Social Services Advisory Boards for social services programs that are not governmentally funded. We are comprised entirely of volunteers who serve on local boards in each of Maryland's 23 counties. Together, the boards finance valuable services to thousands of Marylanders each year, thanks to the businesses and individuals who donate funds and attend fundraising events. Tax ID #26-1192752

Our mailing address is:
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 www.massbfoundation.org

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