

woman in a pre-natal care program - thus assuring that the pregnant woman will in fact receive needed pre-natal nutritional and health care. Benefits flowing under House Bill 1596 together with Food Stamps and Medicaid would substantially fill the gap in income assistance (created by passage of the Omnibus Reconciliation Act) during the first 5 months of pregnancy.

It is my view that, given the uncertainties with respect to implementation of Senate Bill 926 as well as its greater fiscal impact, the more reasonable approach to solving this problem is to sign House Bill 1596. The budget enacted by the General Assembly for Fiscal Year 1983, beginning July 1, 1982, does not include funding to implement either of these bills. In signing House Bill 1596, however, I have directed the Department of Human Resources to begin extending these benefits effective July 1, 1982 by utilizing existing appropriations where possible.

Implementation of House Bill 1596 effective July 1, 1982 is consistent with this Administration's steadfast commitment both to alleviate the harshest impacts of the massive federal cutbacks in funds under the Omnibus Reconciliation Act and to improve the level of Maryland's income assistance programs. The General Assembly supported my proposals for 9% increases in AFDC and General Public Assistance benefits in the budget just enacted. Over the past 4 years we have increased AFDC benefits by a total of 30%, including the two largest single year increases in the State's history.

Moreover the budget also includes several other major fiscal commitments targeted at low-income families. These include: raising the AFDC "standard of need" in order to restore AFDC benefits lost by the working poor; expansion of day care, child abuse and foster care and adoption programs; expansion of services to the elderly and to the mentally retarded and mentally ill; and State funding to "hold harmless" many other vital human services programs from the federal funding cutbacks. Few if any states have made such a strong, sustained effort to mitigate the plight of the poor and vulnerable in the face of federal retrenchment.

I commend the sponsors and supporters of both Senate Bill 926 and House Bill 1596 for recognizing the need for the State to assist low-income pregnant women, particularly during the first 5 months of pregnancy when the Omnibus Reconciliation Act leaves them without any cash assistance. With the signing of House Bill 1596, we will have assumed responsibility to help pregnant women to better meet their essential needs during this critical pre-natal period.

Sincerely,