



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

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Support

SB 35 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – State Supplement Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, January 17, 2024

Testimony of Michelle S. Madaio, Director – Economic Justice Homeless Persons Representation Project

The Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit civil legal services organization that provides free legal representation to people who are experiencing homeless or at risk of homelessness on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP regularly represents individuals and families in accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits through administrative appeals and advocacy.

SB 35 will help reduce hunger among Marylanders by increasing the minimum SNAP benefit to \$95 per month. HPRP has worked with many low-income individuals and families who only qualify for \$23 per month in SNAP, which is less than \$1 per day and simply not enough. Many of HPRP’s clients who receive only \$23¹ per month are working minimum-wage jobs. For example, Gina is a single mom who works at a school cafeteria and is immunocompromised due to a health condition. Gina spends nearly all her income on rent, utilities, transportation and other basic costs of supporting her daughter. Gina only qualifies for \$23/mo. in SNAP, which does not allow her to access the quantity or healthy foods she needs to sustain a nutritious diet.² Increasing the minimum SNAP benefit to \$95/mo. means Gina and other people experiencing food insecurity can purchase the groceries they need to stay healthy and avoid hunger.³

SB 35 would likely incentivize more Marylanders who qualify for SNAP to apply. Many older adults and people living with disabilities who receive federal disability benefits qualify for the minimum SNAP benefit, yet do not apply due to the low benefit amount. The onerous application process, travel on public transportation back and forth to the local Department of Social Services offices, long wait times, and paperwork simply make the process too cumbersome to complete for only \$23/mo. An increase to the minimum benefit would likely result in more low-income Marylanders utilizing the SNAP program.

HPRP strongly urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 35. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Madaio (she/her), Director – Economic Justice at (410) 716-0521 or mmadaio@hprplaw.org.

¹ MD’s minimum SNAP benefit is \$23/mo for people age 61 and younger and \$40/mo for people age 62 and older.

² Lewis M, Herron LM, Chatfield MD, Tan RC, Dale A, Nash S, Lee AJ. Healthy Food Prices Increased More Than the Prices of Unhealthy Options during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Concurrent Challenges to the Food System. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, (Feb. 10, 2023), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9967271/>.

³ Patricia M. Anderson, Kristin F. Butcher, “The Relationships Among SNAP Benefits, Grocery Spending, Diet Quality, and the Adequacy of Low-Income Families’ Resources,” Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, (June 2016) available at <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/6-14-16fa.pdf>.