



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB0035

January 17, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: SB 35: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - State Supplement

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 35.

SB 35 repeals the minimum age that a member of a household must be for eligibility for a State-provided supplemental benefit under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); and increases the amount of the supplemental benefit that the State must provide from \$40 to \$95. The timing for this bill is critical as emergency allotments ended in March 2023. Prior to March 2023, households received no less than \$281 per month, and a household of four received no less than \$973 per month. Currently, SNAP participants are relying on benefits as low as \$23 per month, the Federal minimum.

The loss of emergency allotments has resulted in a "benefits cliff", as 347,320 households across the state experienced a severe cut in SNAP benefits. Although the "benefits cliff" impacts all age groups, the steepest cliff has been for older adults, as many older adults qualify for the minimum SNAP benefit, which dropped from \$281 per month to \$23 per month. Immediately following the loss of emergency allotments, SNAP participation in Baltimore City decreased. As of November 2023, there are 153,055 Baltimore City residents enrolled in SNAP; this accounts for roughly 26% of the City's population.

Our on the ground experience hosting our current Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA) cohort has given us an invaluable perspective on this issue. RFEA are cohorts of Baltimore City residents that work to collectively drive equitable food policies through an inclusive, collaborative process. All Advisors receive compensation for their time. Our current cohort, all of whom are currently enrolled in SNAP and live in public housing sites, have expressed a decline in motivation to continue to apply for benefits, and the need to work multiple jobs in order to afford food. Additionally, many Advisors are currently relying on food banks and food pantries to meet their nutritional needs.

Lower monthly allotments, inflation, and residents relying on emergency food assistance is negatively impacting the State's food system. It is estimated that for every \$1 provided through SNAP, \$1.50 is generated in the local food economy. These estimates would result in a loss of \$105 million in the State's economy every month, and over \$1 billion annually. State-wide data from food retailers and farmers markets support this as we continue to see an overall decrease in purchases made using SNAP dollars.

The State of New Jersey and the District of Columbia have recently passed legislation to increase monthly benefits. It is crucial for Maryland to join other states in addressing the "benefits cliff" to support both our residents experiencing food insecurity and the State's food economy.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 35.

*Annapolis – phone: 410.269.0207 • fax: 410.269.6785
Baltimore – phone: 410.396.3497 • fax: 410.396.5136
<https://mogr.baltimorecity.gov/>*