

Increasing SNAP benefits would provide relief to struggling Marylanders

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 35

Given before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

With the end of additional federal support to combat heightened food insecurity resulting from the pandemic, increasing the minimum monthly amount for Maryland's supplemental benefit under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to a minimum of \$95 per month and eliminating the minimum age for that benefit would have a lasting impact on the lives of many struggling Marylanders. This would help promote economic security for low-income Marylanders struggling to keep food on the table as they face higher costs of food and inflation. For these reasons, **the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports Senate Bill 35.**

The reality is that Maryland households continue to struggle to put food on the table. Latest available data for the month of October 2023 show that over 366,000 Maryland households were participating in SNAP, a potential increase of 4.5% from October 2022.ⁱ This roughly translates into over 682,000 Marylanders who were able to access more nutritious food because of SNAP during October 2023. The hunger that Marylanders are experiencing is further supported from the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey which shows that between October 18 and October 30, 2023, over 445,000 Marylanders reported experiencing food insecurity at least sometimes.ⁱⁱ

The price of food has risen at rates that have not been seen before in recent history. Reports show that average annual food prices rose by 3.5% between 2019 and 2020. To put this figure in context, over the last 20 years the level of retail food price inflation has been 2% per year.ⁱⁱⁱ While these numbers can be attributed, in part, to the supply-chain issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of higher food costs has not disappeared. Increasing the minimum supplemental benefit and extending it to reach more people is necessary to account for these rapid changes, so that Marylanders can put food on the table and meet their nutritional needs.

Ensuring that families can afford to purchase enough groceries allows adults to continue working and helps children focus on learning rather than being hungry in school. By raising the minimum monthly supplemental benefit to \$95, the state will be able to foster healthier communities and boost the economy.

In addition to the immediate relief SNAP provides in the form of food assistance, evidence shows it also makes long-term improvements in the lives of individuals and families. Research shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity and poverty, leading to improved health and economic outcomes as a result. This is especially true for those who receive SNAP as children. Studies show that adults who participate in SNAP have fewer sick days, fewer medical visits, and are less likely to exhibit psychological distress. Additionally, children with access to SNAP

benefits were less likely to have heart disease, stunted growth, or be obese.^{iv} Marylanders who receive food assistance are therefore more likely to be able to support themselves, which is also good for the state's economy.

Senate Bill 35 is an important step in helping more low-income families afford to get enough to eat. SNAP has proven to be successful in creating more economic security for these families in need and can continue to be effective by making these changes to the supplemental benefit.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Budget and Taxation Committee give a favorable report to Senate Bill 35.

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 35

Bill summary

Senate Bill 35 raises the minimum monthly amount for Maryland's supplemental benefit under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program from \$40 to \$95 and repeals the minimum age to be eligible for these benefits.

Background

During the pandemic those who received SNAP were given the maximized allotment for their household size. Now that the public health emergency has come to an end, over 347,000 Maryland households have seen a reduction in their SNAP amounts despite experiencing continued hardship.^v Many families are left in a position where they no longer have the financial resources to meet their nutritional needs. In fact, SNAP households in Maryland collectively lost \$69 million in federal food benefits per month. The biggest difference was seen among older adults. The average monthly benefit per person between December 2022 and February 2023 was \$281 in Maryland, later decreasing to \$162 shortly after the end of the emergency allotments. This decrease of about 42% makes a significant difference for people trying to stretch their dollars^{vi}.

Equity Implications

Policies in the past have led to a system of unequal opportunities for marginalized groups within Maryland. Although the most obvious racially discriminatory policies have long been overturned or mitigated, the impact of these policies continue to persist in both society and public policy and have led to significant racial and health disparities. People of color experience much higher rates of economic insecurity and poverty and are more likely to use SNAP to afford enough to eat.

Research shows that increasing economic security for households through programs like SNAP can help reduce overall poverty, child poverty, and racial and ethnic inequities. This is especially true in Maryland as 59% of all adult SNAP recipients were Black in state fiscal year 2022. Increasing the minimum monthly supplemental SNAP benefit and eliminating the age requirement will enable this program to have a greater impact and reach more of those in need. Meeting this need strengthens our economy and can dismantle the economic barriers that too often hold back Marylanders of color.

Impact

Senate Bill 35 would likely **improve racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Latest Available Month-October 2023 State Level Participation & Benefits, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

ⁱⁱ Household Pulse Survey, Week 63, Food Sufficiency and Food Insecurity Table 1, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp63.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ “Food Prices and Spending,” The United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2021, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-prices-and-spending/?topicId=1afac93a-444e-4e05-99f3-53217721a8b>

^{iv} “Chart Book: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2019, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/chart-book-snap-helps-struggling-families-put-food-on-the-table#part4>

^v Food Research & Action Center, “Hunger Cliff 2023: Maryland,” https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SNAP_FRAC_FactSheets_Maryland.pdf

^{vi} Hall, Lauren. (2023, September 21). End of SNAP’s temporary emergency allotments resulted in substantial benefit cut. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/end-of-snaps-temporary-emergency-allotments-resulted-in-substantial-benefit-cut>