



Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger and promoting well-being

February 18, 2026

TESTIMONY FOR SB 461
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Heat and Eat Program - Eligibility
Informational Only
Senate Finance Committee

Greetings Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair Hayes, and Members of the Finance Committee.

My name is LaMonika Jones. I am the Director of Maryland Hunger Solutions. We are a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger, improve nutrition and promote the well-being of Marylanders by maximizing participation in federal nutrition programs, addressing root causes of hunger and advocating for permanent solutions upending hunger and poverty statewide. We strive to overcome existing barriers to state and federal nutrition assistance programs and create self-sustaining connections for low-income Maryland residents experiencing food insecurity.

Maryland Hunger Solutions conducts robust Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach across the state providing direct application assistance to any Marylander seeking to apply for SNAP, offering one-on-one support to complete applications, gathering required documentation, troubleshoot case issues, and navigate recertification.

Our goal is to reduce barriers to enrollment and help ensure individuals and families can access the food assistance they need in a timely manner.

We regularly support residents who report skipping meals, rationing food, and limiting utility use to prioritize other basic living expenses. “Heat and Eat” is a necessary measure needed to help families and households mitigate these harmful trade-offs. No household should have to choose between food, utility or housing cost in order to meet their most basic needs.

The Heat and Eat Program, a \$21 once-a-year payment, helps SNAP households qualify for the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA), the highest utility deduction available when calculating SNAP benefit amounts. Qualifying for the SUA results in increased SNAP benefits for eligible households. By deeming all SNAP households automatically eligible for the utility allowance, we are ensuring residents who live on lower and fixed incomes, can receive higher and more adequate SNAP benefits without facing unnecessary administrative barriers.

Recent federal policy changes H.R. 1/”OBBA” impose the largest structural changes and benefit cuts in SNAP’s history, disproportionately thousands of Maryland residents. H.R. 1/”OBBA” has reshaped SNAP and Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) eligibility in ways that targets working families experiencing food insecurity and rising utility costs. H.R. 1/”OBBA” also changes how states are required to apply the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA). Under these new rules, only households with elderly or disabled persons are automatically eligible to receive the SUA when they receive a qualifying LIHEAP or “Heat and Eat” energy assistance payment. Households without an



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elderly or disabled member no longer automatically qualify for the SUA and require additional verifications of heating and cooling expenses – making it harder for many low-income families to maintain higher benefit amounts.

More than 680,000 Marylanders including upwards of 270,000 children [rely on support](#) from SNAP benefits to feed themselves and their families. Of this 680,000, 59 percent are working families relying on access to additional supports from programs such as “Heat and Eat”. Changes to LIHEAP under federal rules would mean close to 119,000 residents would lose access to critical support for rising utility costs thus reducing SNAP benefits, potentially exacerbating food insecurity and pushing thousands of Marylanders over hunger cliff, including households with children.

For these reasons, Maryland Hunger Solutions respectfully asks the committee to consider this informational testimony regarding SB 461 on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Heat and Eat Program eligibility.

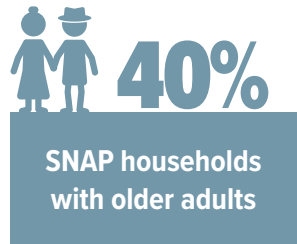
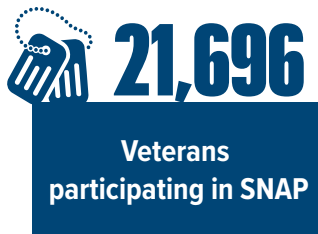
PROTECT SNAP to Reduce Hunger and Strengthen Local Economies in MARYLAND

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger, helping **693,715** people in **MARYLAND** put food on the table. In fiscal year 2024, SNAP brought **\$1,498,978,722** to the state. With **10%** of **MARYLAND** households experiencing food insecurity and high food prices, protecting and strengthening SNAP is more important than ever.

! TAKE ACTION: REJECT PROPOSALS THAT CUT OR RESTRICT ACCESS TO SNAP BENEFITS.

Proposed cuts mean fewer federal funds supporting local economies, children losing school meals, and decreasing WIC participation for babies and toddlers ages 0–4. These cuts would increase hunger by taking food away from Americans in need, decrease local revenue, and overwhelm already strained food pantries. **For every meal a pantry provides, SNAP offers nine.**

SNAP’S IMPACT IN MARYLAND



▶ **11%** of households in **MARYLAND** participated in SNAP. SNAP participants reside throughout the state: **one in 7 rural and one in 6 small-town households** and **one in 9 households in metro areas in MARYLAND.**

▶ In FY 2024, SNAP participants in **MARYLAND** received an **average of \$180.12 per month** in SNAP benefits. This averages **\$5.92 per person per day.**

▶ SNAP helped over **256,482 children in MARYLAND** in FY 2023. It also provided these children with eligibility for school meals. Cuts to SNAP would mean that children in families with low incomes would lose access to school meals.

KEY ECONOMIC FACTS

▶ **SNAP supports working families.** Between 2019–2023, an average of **84%** of SNAP households in **MARYLAND** included someone who was working.

▶ **SNAP stimulates the economy and creates jobs.** Each SNAP dollar has up to a \$1.80 impact during economic downturns, supporting the supply chain from farmer to store.

▶ **SNAP supports local businesses,** including **3,821 retailers in MARYLAND,** which redeemed a total of **\$1,929,524,491** in 2023. Retailers include grocery stores and farmers’ markets, which contribute to local taxes that fund services like schools and health care.

SOURCES FOR THIS FACT SHEET CAN BE FOUND IN THE [TECHNICAL NOTES.](#)

SNAP IS A PROVEN, COST-EFFECTIVE PROGRAM

that reduces food insecurity, supports the health of children, older adults, and veterans. SNAP reduces health care costs, improves educational outcomes, and supports local economies. Support MARYLAND families by opposing any cuts to SNAP.

STRENGTHEN SNAP, STRENGTHEN MARYLAND