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**HB 1532**

March 10, 2020

**TO:** Members of the House Appropriations Committee  
**FROM:** Matthew Stegman, Deputy Director of Government Relations  
**RE:** HOUSE BILL 1532 – Food Supplement Program – Eligibility  
**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair Jackson, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration **supports** House Bill 1532.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal nutrition program under the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered at the state level. Using administrative rule changes, USDA has recently undermined the ability for states like Maryland to seek waivers based on local employment and economic conditions that address the realities for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs). Further proposed changes to “categorical eligibility” and the “standard utility allowance” would decimate this proven federal program. HB 1532 acknowledges the importance of nutrition benefits for Maryland and protects our vulnerable populations against the whims of federal administrations seeking to dismantle proven programs.

In Baltimore, 166,000 residents participate in SNAP each month. Changes to the ABAWD rule that will take effect in April 2020 will eliminate approximately 15,000 participants in Baltimore City and more than 23,000 statewide. The additional proposed changes to categorical eligibility would cause another 15,000 Baltimoreans to no longer be eligible for SNAP, including nearly 3,000 seniors. These two administrative rule changes could eliminate nearly 20% of Baltimore participants from the SNAP rolls, causing devastating and rippling effects.

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SNAP is **proven** to reduce food insecurity in the most vulnerable populations, help lift people out of poverty, and spur our local and regional economies. SNAP is a preventive strategy both in terms of health outcomes as well as healthcare spending. The stressors of food insecurity have chronic and mental health impacts on people of every age. For older adults, having limited income means making trade-offs between buying food, paying for prescriptions or paying for rent. For our children, food insecurity is linked to poor diets, chronic health conditions including asthma and anemia, cognitive and behavioral problems, anxiety and depression, and poorer general health.

SNAP is an economic driver in Maryland and particularly in jurisdictions like Baltimore City. The estimated economic impact of the ABAWD policy, with approximately 15,000 residents losing SNAP benefits in Baltimore City, is \$30 million per year. If proposed policies to remove at least as many people through categorical eligibility go into effect and begin to compound, the financial hits to our retailers and local economy will be catastrophic.

The social safety net cannot absorb the increase in food insecurity these known and proposed policies will create. Resources like food pantries and soup kitchens are already at maximum capacity, and will not be able to adequately serve such a large influx of new clients. Eliminating categorical eligibility would disqualify 265,000 Maryland children from free school lunch, further exacerbating food insecurity and placing greater demands on social services.

As a city, Baltimore has worked diligently to counteract the proposed and enacted policies that will dismantle SNAP. The BCA has done all in its power to elevate and address these issues, including filing supportive testimony in the injunction filed by Attorney General Frosh to halt or reverse the ABAWD rule. In the event the injunction does not hold, Maryland will need additional funding for nutrition benefits and supportive services to prevent food insecurity.

A threat to SNAP is a threat to the health and well-being of our children, older adults and families as a whole. We in Maryland have the ability to reverse these threats and protect our vulnerable populations by standing up for nutrition benefits.

The BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 1532.