JARED SOLOMON
Legislative District 18
Montgomery County

Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

Education and Economic Development

Oversight Committee on Personnel

The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 222
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3130 · 410-841-3130
800-492-7122 *Ext.* 3130
Fax 301-858-3233 · 410-841-3233
Jared.Solomon@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 1532 – Protect Against Hunger Act
Testimony

Good afternoon Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and my esteemed colleagues,

HB 1532, the Protect Against Hunger Act, supports Marylanders who will find themselves ineligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) under new regulations proposed by the Trump Administration. The bill requires the State of Maryland to provide SNAP benefits for any individuals who no longer qualify under federal guidelines, similar to bills passed to protect funding for Maryland Public Television and Title X family planning resources.

The SNAP program, formerly known as Food Stamps, is the nation's most important anti-hunger program. In a typical month in 2018, SNAP helped 40 million struggling Americans afford a nutritionally adequate diet. SNAP benefits can be used to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and some farmers' markets and co-op food programs. The federal government pays the full cost of SNAP benefits and splits the cost of administering the program with states, which operate the program.

Fighting Back on the Trump Administration's Proposed Cuts to SNAP

The Trump Administration has proposed regulations to change how states determine who qualifies for SNAP. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that 3 million Americans and tens of thousands of Marylanders could lose their food assistance under these proposed rules.

First Proposed Rule: Categorical Eligibility Change

- The proposed policy would end states' ability to use broad-based categorical eligibility to waive asset tests and to raise gross income eligibility limits from 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) to as much as 200 percent of FPG. This also makes the program significantly more efficient and reduces the overall paperwork/verification burden.

- In Maryland, you can qualify for SNAP if you're already on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Temporary Emergency Housing. TANF eligibility is 200% of FPG, meaning the state has more flexibility to enroll individuals in need in SNAP. **This rule change will kick an estimated 50,800**

people in Maryland off the SNAP program, according to the White House. According to the Urban Institute, as many as 74,800 people could lose access, which would cost about $44.2 million.

- The current program also automatically qualifies 265,000 schoolchildren for free lunches. Under the administration's proposal, those children would have to apply separately to continue to get those meals.

- Forty states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands had BBCE in 2018. **Most states with BBCE waive the SNAP asset test, including Maryland.** All but 10 states with BBCE in 2018 had a higher gross income limit for SNAP eligibility, ranging from 150 percent to 200 percent of FPG.

- The higher gross income limit helps avoid a "benefit cliff" that happens when households with income modestly above the gross income limit have such high shelter or child care expenses that they are otherwise eligible for SNAP benefits.

Second Proposed Policy Change: Setting Standard Utility Allowances (SUA)

- SNAP eligibility rules give recipients wide latitude per state to take a deduction for utilities and telecommunications. States have flexibility in how they set this. The new rule would standardize the methodology across the nation giving some people an increase and some a decrease.

- Nationally, the amount spent on SNAP benefits would fall by $786 million (1.5 percent).

- **Under calculations done by the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS), the SUA in the state could drop by as much as $135 a month – resulting in a reduction in benefits across the state.**

While this bill would likely have an expensive price tag, it would be costly to Maryland's economy to ignore those that might lose these supports. Not only do SNAP benefits support a household's food purchasing needs, these benefits also lift the incomes and spending of others (such as farmers, retailers, food processors, and food distributors, as well as their employees), which in turn, has ripple effects for other parties.

The United States Department of Agriculture's own Economic Research Service has estimated the multiplier of SNAP benefits on economic growth to be $1.54. **That means for every $100 spent on SNAP, the economic return is $154.** The fact that SNAP provides direct payments to low-income households rather likely may result in larger employment impacts than many other types of government spending, particularly during a major recession.

For thousands of Marylanders who could lose support or who find themselves ineligible for SNAP benefits under the federal government's rule changes, this bill will provide them with the security of knowing they will no longer face the threat of hunger. I urge a favorable report on HB 1532.