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RE: Letter of Support, HB 1532 – Food Supplement Program – Eligibility

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair Jackson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sheena Ham. I am a resident of the Panway neighborhood in Baltimore City. I have been the President of the Parent Teacher Organization at Gwynn's Falls Elementary, where my nine-year-old son Antonyo attends school, for the past four years. In my role as PTO President, parents and families come to me directly when the limited food resources the school can provide are not enough. I hear people's stories and as a previous SNAP participant, I know how important SNAP can be when a family or individual is struggling.

SNAP is an on and off process for most people. In my experience, I participated in SNAP when I needed assistance after the birth of my son. After a while, we did not need additional support and left the program. A few years later, I was in a position where I needed assistance and turned to SNAP, but the application process was overwhelming. It then felt cumbersome, frustrating, and demoralizing to deal with the barriers and off-putting service during an already strenuous time for my family, so I quit the application and never tried again. My family likely qualifies for SNAP now, but I am hesitant to apply due to my experience last time.

I hear stories like this from the families at my school often. The vast majority of people do not wish to be on SNAP forever and use it when it is necessary to fill the gaps and make ends meet. The only people I know who have received SNAP for a really consistent time are older people because their situations, proof of income and need remain relatively stable.

It's very important for SNAP to be as easy as possible to be enrolled. A families' or an individual's need for SNAP comes during a highly stressful time when the ability to provide is unstable or even nonexistent. Being able to buy food will mean the difference between paying rent and going hungry or feeding your family and fearing eviction. An unnecessarily challenging SNAP enrollment process not only adds weight to ones acute mental and emotional strain but it also essentially prohibits a person from confidently viewing the program as the viable resource it is.

Proposed federal changes to Categorical Eligibility will only serve to make it much harder to apply for SNAP and may discourage even more people from participating. If SNAP participation decreases, not only will food insecurity increase, but the numbers used to calculate participation will negatively reduce our school's ability to provide services and receive Title I funding.

For these reasons, I ask that you **support** House Bill 1532