



# **HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.**

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## **SUPPORT – HB 1532 Protection Against Hunger Act**

Hearing Before the House Appropriations Committee, March 10, 2020

Testimony of Gabriela I. Sevilla, Equal Justice Works Fellow Sponsored by Pfizer, Inc., Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit legal services organization that provides free legal representation to people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP supports HB 1532, which aims at protecting Marylanders who are eligible for the food supplement program, federally known as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), from experiencing food insecurity should their benefits be terminated due to lack of federal funding.

Marylanders who are classified under SNAP as able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) will be the most affected by recent federal changes to SNAP that will take effect April 1, 2020. HB 1532 aims to protect ABAWDS from hunger due to the harsh three month time limit an ABAWD can receive SNAP in a 36-month period unless they meet specific work requirements.<sup>1</sup> Previously Maryland received a waiver from this requirement in jurisdictions that lacked sufficient jobs for benefit recipients but the Trump administration significantly limits them to obtain a waiver and exemption from the rule. An estimated 16% percent of ABAWD households across the U.S. will lose eligibility under the federal changes.<sup>2</sup>

We use the term “able-bodied adult” loosely as it also defines adults who do not have a documented disability. From our experience working in Baltimore City many adults, especially men of color, live with undiagnosed or untreated mental health disabilities due to social stigma, or because mental health is not prioritized when food, and housing are other major priorities, in response to this the Black Mental Health Alliance developed a program in West Baltimore to address psychological trauma and racial stress in the community.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, 93.5% of SNAP recipients are non-white and identify as Black, Latinx, Mixed, or Asian.<sup>4</sup> Therefore cuts in SNAP benefits will likely have a disproportionate impact on people of color living in poverty. HB 1532 will ensure that people of color receiving SNAP benefits remain food secure and will balance the racial inequities in relation to hunger.

HB 1532 will also reduce hunger for families who would lose eligibility under the federal changes to broad-based categorical eligibility. It is estimated that 40,500 Maryland households would not have qualified for benefits without broad-based categorical eligibility, this is among the highest estimate of all states.<sup>5</sup> SNAP helps families and individuals afford a more adequate diet, responds to changes in economic conditions, and has long-term benefits for children including better health and education outcomes.<sup>6</sup> HB 1532 aims at keeping Marylanders from experiencing the trauma of being hungry and supports a healthier Maryland.

Please contact Gabriela I. Sevilla, at 410-685-6589 x12 or [gsevilla@hprplaw.org](mailto:gsevilla@hprplaw.org) with any questions

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1 Laura Wheaton, [Estimated Effect of Recent Proposed Changes to SNAP Regulations](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimated-effect-recent-proposed-changes-snap-regulations/view/full_report) p.5 available at [https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimated-effect-recent-proposed-changes-snap-regulations/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimated-effect-recent-proposed-changes-snap-regulations/view/full_report) (November 2019)

2 Id. at p.3

3 Leana Wen, M.D., M.Sc., Commissioner of Health, Baltimore City Health Department, White Paper: State of Health in Baltimore, available at p.9 <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/state-health-baltimore-winter-2016/state-health-baltimore-white-paper-2017> (March 2017)

4 Data from U.S. Census Bureau <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Maryland/Food-Stamps> (September 2018)

5 Laura Wheaton, Id. at p.12

6 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “ChartBook: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table,” updated November 7, 2019, available at <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-13-12fa-chartbook.pdf>.