



**Maryland Hunger Solutions**

*Ending hunger and promoting well-being*

Testimony in support of

HB 1532, The Protect Against Hunger Act

By

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Maryland Hunger Solutions

Maryland Hunger Solutions is a statewide, non-partisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger, improve nutrition, and promote the well-being of Marylanders in need by spreading best practices through education, advocacy, outreach, and collaboration. That is why we are here today in support of HB 1532, the Protect Against Hunger Act.

We advocate to improve, strengthen and expand access to existing federal and state nutrition programs, such as school meals, and we strive to improve public policies to better address the needs of people living in poverty. That is why we successfully advocated for Maryland to supplement the minimum SNAP benefit. While millions of SNAP recipients across the nation receive the minimum benefit of \$15 a month, here in Maryland, if you are 62 and over and are eligible for the minimum benefit, the State of Maryland makes sure that you won't get less than \$30 a month. \$30 a month won't make you wealthy, but it is a smart investment in the health and the nutrition of low-income Marylanders aged 62 and up and are dollars that get spent in our local grocery stores, farmers markets, and corner stores, helping our local economy. I feel obligated to say, at the same time, that our neighbors in the District of Columbia make sure that no SNAP recipient receives less than \$30 a month – regardless of age.

The state of Maryland has been strategic in many ways in addressing food insecurity. Increasing the minimum benefit, creating the Maryland Meals for Achievement Program (which provides in the classroom breakfast for low-income schools), aiding the expansion of community eligibility, which provides free breakfast and lunch to schools or school districts are examples of this strategic approach. In addition, I want to commend the Maryland Department of Human Services for their thoughtful approach to the state SNAP recipients who are deemed able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDS). Under both the O'Malley and the Hogan Administrations, DHS waived the federally mandated time-limits recognizing that economic and transportation challenges made the requirements unlikely to be met. Unfortunately, recent regulatory proposals have rendered that strategic approach moot.



In fact, it is because of USDA's recent regulatory agenda that we are here today in support of this legislation. HB 1532 seeks to hold Maryland SNAP recipients harmless from the onslaught of proposals which will deny SNAP benefits from otherwise eligible Marylanders, as well as reduce their benefits. In particular, the efforts by the Trump Administration to change broad-based categorical eligibility and the standard utility allowance will negatively impact thousands in our local communities, and millions across the country.

Broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE), is designed to permit states to raise SNAP income eligibility limits so that some low-income working families can receive help affording adequate food. Many low-income working families often have difficulty making ends meet, because of costly housing or child care expenses that consume a sizeable share of their income. This policy, adopted in some form by more than 40 states and in effect for more than two decades, lets states use less restrictive asset tests so that families, seniors, and people with disabilities can have modest savings without losing SNAP. The proposed regulatory proposal would reduce the ability of states to utilize categorical eligibility, which will both reduce SNAP participation and reduce benefits. This will also have the residual impact of reducing free school meals for over 950,000 students nationwide, and thousands of students in Maryland.

The standard utility allowance (SUA) is a fixed dollar amount for a household's heating and utility expenses used in the calculation of shelter expenses for SNAP benefits. The recent proposal is an attempt to use national data which will have the impact of reducing benefits in many states, including Maryland.

Over 600,000 Marylanders in every jurisdiction currently utilize the SNAP program, many of whom are children, seniors and the disabled. We believe that reducing their benefits would have harmful health, nutrition, and economic impacts on our state and especially on our poorest residents. There is no reason to deny them benefits or take away their food – and if Maryland chooses to continue to use smart strategic approaches to addressing food insecurity, we must work to ensure that our residents are not negatively impacted by these policies.

We believe that ensuring a "status quo" in terms of benefits and participation would be a prudent policy for Maryland. We urge your support for HB 1532.

Thank you for your consideration.