



BILL: HB1532: Human Services – Food Supplement Program – Eligibility
COMMITTEE: House Appropriations Committee
POSITION: Testimony of Support of House Bill 1532
NAME: Elizabeth Martinez Umana

Thank you Chair McIntosh and Members of the House Appropriations Committee for convening this hearing today and for the opportunity to give my testimony. Thank you to Delegate Solomon for your leadership on this important effort.

My name is Elizabeth Martinez Umana, and I am a resident of Montgomery County, Maryland, and a member of the Montgomery County Food Council’s Food Security Community Advisory Board, which convenes 13 Montgomery County residents who have experienced food insecurity on a quarterly basis to solve food access challenges in our area.

I am here to **SUPPORT** HB 1532 sponsored by Delegate Solomon, as a private citizen and immigrant to this country, because it seeks to protect food access and Food Supplement Program (or SNAP) eligibility for food-insecure Maryland residents and families, despite any changes in federal law that could impact benefits access for these individuals.

Recent legislation at the federal level has generated fear and confusion among residents concerning their participation in the benefits programs upon which they rely, which their tax dollars help to support, and most importantly, for which they are legally eligible. This includes the recent Public Charge ruling that clarified that participation in federal nutrition programs can be used against certain legal residents in the evaluation of their applications to remain in the United States, causing many people to voluntarily remove themselves from SNAP.

I am a previous recipient of the SNAP program. This program provided food for my two children who were 5 and 6 years old when I was divorced and unemployed. It is critical to support this program because without it, many people in our community, including those who are single and unemployed with children, will go hungry.

This program gave me the peace of mind not to worry about where the next meal was coming from, and enabled me to purchase milk, eggs, bread, meat and healthy food, which, in turn, allowed me to focus on attending Montgomery College to get an Associate’s Degree and eventually find a job with the State of Maryland.

My children received free lunches through MCPS during their time in elementary and middle school. When my elderly mother moved into my home, I once again had to apply for the SNAP program in order to provide healthy meals during her stay with me, as her SSI assistance was not nearly enough to cover all her living expenses, let alone food.

The SNAP program assisted me greatly during the hardest moments of my life and I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to make sure that low income families can access these benefits when they are struggling. If I had not been able to access the program, I would have had to get two jobs in order to afford my rent, car insurance, utilities, clothing and food for my children and mother, due to the fact that it is very expensive to live in Montgomery County. SNAP benefits help low-wage families make ends meet. For a family of three with one wage earner who earns the minimum wage, the SNAP program increases the family's take-home income by roughly 10 to 20 percent, depending on the number of hours worked.

This experience is mirrored by many people in my community, and I speak for all of them through my testimony. Therefore, it is critical that Maryland passes this bill to protect Marylanders against the potentially negative impacts of federal legislation that could increase food insecurity rates, state- and nation-wide.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote **FOR** HB 1532. Thank you.