



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

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SUPPORT – HB 101

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Heat and Eat Program

Hearing of the Appropriations Committee, February 10, 2021

Testimony of Michelle Madaio, Senior Attorney, Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit civil 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 has represented thousands of individuals and families in accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits through administrative appeals and advocacy. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic last spring, HPRP launched a bilingual (English/Spanish) SNAP Free Legal Help Hotline which connected us with hundreds of Marylanders across the state who experienced food and housing insecurity.

HB 101 would require the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) to introduce the federal “Heat and Eat” program in Maryland, which would boost the SNAP benefit for certain households eligible for energy assistance once the COVID-19 pandemic ends. Currently all individuals and families in Maryland who are determined eligible for SNAP are temporarily receiving the maximum benefit for their household size.¹ When this temporary emergency measure ends, the Maryland Department of Human Services will revert to calculating the SNAP benefit based on a household’s size and countable net monthly income (gross income minus any eligible deductions). HB 101 would allow low-income households that receive energy assistance through Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to qualify for a Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) that could result in an increase to their SNAP benefit.

An additional SNAP benefit would increase food security, allow individuals and families to afford more nutritious foods, which can contribute to improved health and educational achievement. HPRP’s clients must make difficult decisions to budget their SNAP benefit to last the entire month. To do this, families often skip meals and will purchase less fruits, vegetables and other nutritious foods because they cost less. When income is extremely limited, many of our clients have had to make the difficult choice between paying rent, medical bills, purchasing food, or paying for water and utility bills. Nationally, half of all households that receive SNAP benefits still experience food insecurity and are unable to purchase enough food to live a healthy life.² HB 101 will increase the SNAP benefit for many households that receive energy assistance, which will expand access to food for more days out of the month.

HPRP urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB 101. Please contact Michelle Madaio at 410-774-6992 or mmadaio@hprplaw.org with any questions.

¹ The maximum benefits will continue until the Secretary for Health and Human Services rescinds the public health emergency declaration or the State-issued emergency or disaster declaration expires. *See* United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Month-To-Month Contingent Approval to Continue Issuing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Emergency Allotments (EA) Benefits under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2021, *available at* <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/MD-SNAP-COV-EmergencyAllotmentsExtension10-Acknowledged.pdf>.

² Steven Carlson, Brynne Keith-Jennings and Joseph Llobrera, “Policy Brief: More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food,” (July 30, 2019), *available at* <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/7-30-19fa2.pdf>