

February 10, 2021

Testimony in Support of HB 786

Department of Human Services, Maryland Department of Health, and Department of Education
– Easing Access to Family Support Programs

House Appropriations Committee

Maryland Hunger Solutions supports HB 786, which requires the Department of Human Services, the Maryland Department of Health, and the State Department of Education to coordinate efforts and work together to simplify the administrative process and remove barriers for low-income Marylanders seeking to access the safety net programs that each department administers.

Although Maryland is one of the wealthiest states in the nation, approximately 10% of Marylanders were living in poverty before the COVID-19 pandemic. That number has only increased in the past year as the economic impact of the pandemic has thrown hundreds of thousands of Marylanders into financial uncertainty. SNAP Participation in Maryland has skyrocketed from approximately 590,000 people accessing SNAP benefits in Maryland pre-pandemic to a peak of 856,000¹ participants in July 2020.

We cannot overstate the importance of safety net programs, especially during these uncertain times. As Maryland moves forward in addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19, one of our key priorities must be to ensure adequate access to programs that provide benefits for necessities like healthy, affordable food, as well as housing, transportation, and other basic needs. Not only do these programs ease the financial strain that many of these families are feeling, but they also help to bolster local economies by bringing federal dollars into the community. For instance, research suggests that programs like SNAP which are targeted to low-income households have relatively high multipliers with values up to \$2 of economic activity for every dollar spent.²

HB 786 takes an important step in improving access to safety net programs by requiring better coordination between three major state departments in charge of many of these programs. There are several examples of when this coordination would be helpful in our work. The Community Eligibility Program for free universal school meals depends on collaboration between MSDE and the State Department of Human services, as does the newly created Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Program. These existing programs are critical for low-income Marylanders who need an efficient and effective state government operation.

¹ <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/snap-participation-reaches-historic-levels-in-maryland/>

² https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err265_summary.pdf?v=1768



Additionally, as the Department of Human Services moves to launch MD THINK, it is critical that these additional coordination efforts take place alongside this technological advancement in order to ensure that all barriers are addressed, including those outside of the application platform.

Maryland Hunger Solutions appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for HB 786.