



Welfare Advocates

Founded 1979

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House Bill 101
Human Services – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Heat and Eat Program

House Appropriations Committee
February 10, 2021

Support

Welfare Advocates is a statewide coalition of social service organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and community members, whose mission it is to educate ourselves, and the wider community and to advocate for an adequate safety net and public policies that support families moving towards economic stability.

Welfare Advocates supports HB 101, which establishes the Heat and Eat Program in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the Department of Human Services.

SNAP is a critical safety-net program that reduces food insecurity for low-income Marylanders. Statewide, over 790,000 Maryland children, families, and seniors utilize SNAP to purchase healthy food and maintain adequate nutrition. While SNAP benefits are an essential part of the safety-net, for many households the benefits are not adequate enough for families to access proper nutrition for the entire month. Thus, any increase that can be made in the SNAP benefit amount for low-income households will reduce food insecurity and combat hunger.

HB 101 establishes the Heat and Eat Program within the SNAP program, creating a new avenue to get additional SNAP dollars to vulnerable households. Heat and Eat is an existing federal option – that Maryland has yet to utilize – that provides an enhanced SNAP benefit for households that receive both SNAP and Energy Assistance. In a 2016 analysis of implementing the Heat & Eat Program in Maryland, the Maryland Department of Human Services estimated 32,000 Marylanders would receive an average of \$59 a month of additional SNAP benefits if the program was implemented. By targeting those accessing both SNAP and energy assistance, it lifts low-income Marylanders struggling with both food insecurity and energy costs. Implementing Heat and Eat – like more than a dozen states have done - Maryland could provide millions of dollars of additional SNAP benefits to low-income households, increasing food security across the state for vulnerable populations.

HB 101 is a smart investment in the wellbeing of low-income Marylanders - and in the local economy. SNAP recipients spend their benefits on food in neighborhood grocery stores, farmers markets, and other local retailers. For every \$5 spent in SNAP, \$9 is generated in local economic activity, yielding a strong return on investment. Implementing Heat and Eat leverages more federal dollars that feed into the local economy.

For the reasons stated above, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 101.

Submitted by Lisa Kligenmaier, Chair of Welfare Advocates
