

February 16, 2021

**2021 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY  
SB0913: Heat and Eat Program**

**BILL:** SB0913: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Heat and Eat Program  
**COMMITTEE:** Finance  
**POSITION:** Testimony of Support of Senate Bill 0913  
**BILL ANALYSIS:** Establishing the Heat and Eat Program within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in the Department of Human Services; providing that the purpose of the Program is to expand food access to households that are receiving or eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits; requiring the Department to make a certain determination for a household to receive certain benefits; and requiring the Department to adopt certain regulations.

Dear Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today. My name is Vanessa Pierre and I am a resident and food activist in Montgomery County, Maryland. The mission of my organization, Homestead Hustle & Healing, is to build strong, self sufficient, empowered and healthy minority communities through food & gardening education, demonstration, & advocacy. I also have the pleasure of serving on the Montgomery County Food Council’s Food Security Community Advisory Board and the Client Leadership Council for the Capital Area Food Bank. It is with deep personal understanding of the needs of food insecure residents, through my work in the community, that I urge you to **SUPPORT** this bill.

The “Heat & Eat” program will allow the State of Maryland to become a bridge - connecting an estimated 32,000 residents to a Federally funded program already enacted by 15 other states and the District of Columbia. In your consideration of supporting this program, it is my intent to draw your attention to the real life implications of this bill. The impact on the people we aim to help today is oftentimes lost in the numbers and legal jargon. I invite you to take a moment and consider the real impact on families and businesses.

It goes without saying the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has left on Marylanders. In a state where the cost of living already exceeds that of many states in the country, SNAP-enrollment has grown to nearly 43 million families. Food banks and pantries have risen to the challenge with boots on the ground to meet the needs of the people, many of which are forced to supplement their SNAP benefits by standing in line hours at a time no matter the weather conditions to make sure they can feed their families for seven days instead of five. In the midst of the decisions that have had to be made during this most difficult times, Marylanders who have already established a need are being forced to choose not only the quantity of their meals, but also the quality of their meals. Food prices are rising, unemployment is rising, as well as infection rates of those affected by food related pre-existing conditions. It is time that our support of food insecure families, seniors, veterans, and disabled community members rise as well.

A 2016 study by the Maryland Department of Human Resources has estimated that the Heat & Eat Program could provide nearly 32,000 Marylanders with an average of \$59 per month in additional SNAP benefits. The impact of \$59, seemingly small in the grand scheme of legislation, can have a profound

impact on the lives of everyday people. This can eliminate the decision of a single mother on whether to join her children for a meal or skip it to make sure everyone eats. For families, this is the difference between weekend hunger or weekend meals. For food providers, this lessens the burden and allows them to fight another day to feed those who are really in need. The larger impact is seen in the local economy, with small businesses already struggling to keep their doors open. Of all consumer purchases - Food is-the most local. When we pour into our communities members,as is possible through the passage of this bill, they will in turn, pour back support into their own communities and stimulate local economies.

The passage of SB0913 is essential for Maryland to directly combat food insecurity and provide energy assistance to hard hit households across the state, as well as stimulate our own local economies and decrease the demand on local food banks and pantries. For these reasons and more, I urge you to vote **FOR** this bill.

*Homestead Hustle & Healing is an organization in Montgomery County, Maryland established to combat food insecurity in low income, minority, and immigrant communities through food & garden education, demonstration and advocacy. Our initiatives aim to promote self sufficiency in these targeted groups through school gardening, workshops and seminars, the promotion, community garden projects, creation of farmers markets in underserved areas, and support of aligned partner organizations initiatives.*

For more information, please contact: Vanessa Pierre, MCFC Food Security Community Advisory Board Member and Founder of Homestead Hustle & Healing, [vanessa@homesteadhustlehealing.com](mailto:vanessa@homesteadhustlehealing.com)