



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 913

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Heat and Eat Program

Senate Finance Committee

February 18, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 913, which requires the Department of Human Services to establish the Heat & Eat Program within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (also known as SNAP and formerly known as food stamps) in Maryland. The Heat & Eat Program is an existing federal program which allows low-income residents who are eligible for SNAP and eligible for energy assistance to receive additional federal SNAP dollars.

The Heat & Eat program is designed to address food assistance and energy assistance for homes as well as for apartments where utility costs are included in the rent by providing a Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP or MEAP in Maryland) benefit to eligible households. This benefit qualifies recipients for a “standard utility allowance,” an average of the state’s utility costs. This increases the likelihood of the household qualifying for increased shelter deductions and recalculates their SNAP benefits. A 2016 analysis by Maryland Department of Human Services estimates ~32,000 Marylanders would receive an average \$59 boost to their monthly SNAP benefits.

This program is especially critical during the Covid-19 Pandemic. By targeting those accessing both SNAP and energy assistance, it lifts those struggling with both food insecurity and energy costs. SNAP has become a more powerful means of enabling eligible participants to put food on the table by expanding food budgets. With the implementation of the online SNAP program last year, which allows SNAP users to purchase groceries via online retailers, and the incoming Restaurant Meals Program, which allows certain populations to use their benefits at restaurants, SNAP dollars are an important part of our local economy. In FY2020 more than a billion dollars in SNAP benefits was spent in Maryland, providing support to grocery stores, farmers markets, and the entire agriculture supply chain.

MAP advocates for Marylanders from all walks of life, and if the Heat & Eat Program is implemented by Maryland the beneficiaries will include SNAP participants all across the state; seniors, families with children, as well as veterans or people with a disability.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 913.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.