



**MARYLAND
LEGAL AID**

*Advancing
Human Rights and
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February 8, 2022

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support for House Bill 456: Nutrition Assistance Program – State Supplement

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to support HB 456, which will provide enhanced Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to low-income older adults in Maryland. Many of Maryland Legal Aid's (MLA's) older adult clients rely on the current SNAP State Supplement. HB 456 will provide these clients with increased access to nutrition, health and safety.

MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents, including seniors, nursing home residents, and veterans. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including government benefits, housing, family law, consumer law (e.g., bankruptcy and debt collection), and criminal record expungements to remove barriers to obtaining employment. Erica Bullo, Esq. will testify on behalf of MLA at the request of Delegate Valentino-Smith.

The SNAP program helps low-income households across Maryland purchase food needed for good health. SNAP benefits alleviate hunger and malnutrition and reduce the rate of poverty for families and individuals that receive this benefit.¹ Currently, there is a Maryland SNAP Supplement for older adults age 62 and over. It provides a minimum benefit of \$30 for low-income, older adults across the State. HB 456 would increase the minimum benefit to \$45 and lower the age limit of recipients to 60.

The monthly budget of low-income older adults on a fixed income, leaves little flexibility for necessary expenses such as medications, medical equipment, utilities, and rent. Many older adults sacrifice vital resources to have enough food to survive.

¹ Laura Tiehen et al., *Alleviating Poverty in the United States: The Critical Role of SNAP Benefits*, 132 USDA ECONOMIC RESEARCH REPORT 1 (April 2012), https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44963/17742_err132_1_.pdf?v=4610.7.

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40% of older adults experiencing low-level food security engage in medication underuse to save money.² The SNAP State Supplement fills this gap by increasing older adults' access to food, thereby reducing food insecurity.³ It ensures that older adults have enough money to make it to the end of the month without going hungry or sacrificing vital resources.

Reducing the eligibility age for the SNAP State Supplement will provide this vital benefit to more older adults and will reduce health-related costs associated with food insecurity.⁴ For older adults, SNAP benefits have been proven to reduce the rate of hospitalization and admission to nursing homes in Maryland.⁵ Recent studies show that SNAP benefits lower hospital utilization rates⁶ and reduced likelihood of nursing home admission for adults over 60.⁷ These findings are common sense—it is widely understood that nutrition impacts one's physical health. This resource will support the general well-being of older adults, enhance their health and safety, and their ability to continue to reside in the community. It will reduce the risk of institutionalization in facilities such as nursing homes.

The SNAP State Supplement increase will provide access to a more appropriate quantity of food for Maryland's older adults. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Maryland SNAP recipients have received the maximum benefit allotment, to alleviate food insecurity during a difficult time. This pandemic benefit will be eliminated. Older adults will see a significant reduction in their benefits. Notably, the inflation plaguing the U.S. economy has exacerbated the food budget of low-income older adults. The increase in the SNAP State Supplement benefit amount is essential to access the amount and quality of sustenance needed for health and well-being.

MLA supports HB 456. Low-income older adults across Maryland need the SNAP State Supplement to maintain their health and safety. This bill increases the food purchasing power and promotes the welfare and dignity of Maryland's older adults. More importantly, it provides older adults with the necessary nutritional support to sustain better overall health.

Thank you for considering this written testimony. For the reasons stated above, **MLA urges a favorable report on HB 456.**

Sincerely,

/s/ Erica Bullo
Erica Bullo, Staff Attorney
Maryland Legal Aid

/s/ Alle Andresen
Alle Andresen, Staff Attorney
Long Term Assistance Project
Maryland Legal Aid

² FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CENTER, *Hunger is a Health Issue for Older Adults: Food Security, Health, and the Federal Nutrition Programs*, 3 (Dec. 2019), <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-is-a-health-issue-for-older-adults-1.pdf>. Behaviors included as cost-related medication underuse include skipping medications, talking less medications than prescribed, delaying filling medications, requesting lower cost medications, and not being able to afford medication. *Id.*

³ *See Id.* at 4 (“SNAP reduced the probability of food insecurity by 18 percent for all-elderly households of low-income.”) (citing Matthew Rabbitt, *Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation on Food Insecurity Using a Behavioral Rasch Selection Model* (2013) (U. of North Carolina at Greensboro, Dep’t of Econ. Working Paper Series).

⁴ *See Id.* at 3 (“In 2014, the direct and indirect health-related costs of hunger and food insecurity in the U.S. were estimated to be a staggering \$160 billion.”) (citing John Cook & Anna Poblacion, *Estimating the Health-Related Costs of Food Insecurity and Hunger*, in 2016 Hunger Report: The Nourishing Effect: Ending Hunger, Improving Health, Reducing Inequality (2016) (available at <https://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/downloads/hunger-report-2016-sm.pdf>).

⁵ *See generally* Sarah Szanton et al., *Food Assistance is Associated with Decreased Nursing Home Admissions for Maryland's Dually Eligible Older Adults*, 17 BMC GERIATRICS 162 (2017); Laura Samuel et al., *Does the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Affect Hospital Utilization Among Older Adults? The Case of Maryland*, 21 POPULATION HEALTH MGMT. 88 (2018).

⁶ Samuel, *supra* note 5.

⁷ Szanton, *supra* note 5.