

February 8, 2022

**HB 456
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – State Supplement**

House Appropriations Committee

Position: Support

House Bill 456 increases the amount of the supplemental state food assistance benefit for older adults from \$30 to \$45 and lowers the age of eligibility for this supplemental benefit from 62 to 60.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that two million Marylanders may face food insecurity this year. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, such as older adults. The causes of food insecurity for older adults are complex and often include underlying factors such as increased healthcare needs, low income, and a lack of reliable transportation and other mobility concerns.

The Maryland Food Bank knows that demand for food assistance among the older adult population has been high for many years and been especially heightened during the pandemic. In late 2021, the Maryland Food Bank conducted a poll on food insecurity throughout our service area and found that 55% of Marylanders 65 and older worry about their household's financial situation, and almost 1 in 9 worry about money every day. Tangibly, in the past seven months, for example, orders for our tailored Older Adult Back Up Box (BUB) – a 15 pound pre-packaged box of shelf-stable food – constituted 21% of all of our BUB orders, the most only behind our standard Healthy BUB. 42% of visits to our partners who currently track demographic data, such as local food pantries, were of those 60 years and older. Inquiries into home delivery options are also more frequent.

HB 456 will undoubtedly directly benefit food insecure older adults across Maryland. As a recognized SNAP outreach partner with the state, we understand the struggle that older adults have and will continue to face with their SNAP benefits. Once the maximum benefit allotment for household size ends, older adults could see their benefits shrink to as little as \$30 a month, often from as high as \$250 a month – a significant decrease. SNAP applications for older adults 60 years and older comprise between about 20% and 35% of all applications we assist with, and we anticipate applications will continue on the higher end once our outreach efforts are able to resume in person at low-income senior buildings. It's clear that older adults in particular need further assistance from the state, and now is the time to strengthen the food assistance benefits that they are eligible for. Providing additional support for older adults to purchase food helps sustain their life in other ways, including enabling them to cover other household expenses and supplementing their specific nutritional needs.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 456.