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Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 456

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – State Supplement

House Appropriations Committee

February 8, 2022

Submitted by Julia Gross and Kali Schumitz, Co-Chairs

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports HB 456, which requires the state to provide a supplemental benefit for any adult aged 60 and older who receives less than \$45 a month through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (also known as SNAP and formerly known as food stamps) to a minimum monthly benefit of \$45 a month. With the rising costs of food, the coming benefit cliff, and the continued burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's timely for the state to make an investment in these vulnerable Marylanders.

The SNAP program saw a minor, but long overdue adjustment to its benefit levels in October 2021. The United States Department of Agriculture, who oversees the SNAP program, permanently increased both maximum and minimum benefit levels for recipients across the nation. The minimum benefit increased from \$16 a month to \$20 a month. This adjustment was made in recognition of the increased need for SNAP during the pandemic. However, food prices have skyrocketed nearly 7% over the past two years and are projected to continue increasing at historic levels. In order to keep up with the dramatically increasing cost of food and stay in-step with the federal increase to SNAP benefits, it is an opportune time to make an adjustment to the state supplement.

This supplemental benefit is especially critical during the Covid-19 Pandemic and beyond. 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 in 2020, which allows SNAP users to purchase groceries via online retailers, and the incoming Restaurant Meals Program, which allows older adults and populations to use their benefits at restaurants, SNAP dollars are an important part of our local economy. In FY2021 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 acknowledges that older adults have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. If the State Supplemental Benefit is implemented by Maryland, the beneficiaries will include older adult SNAP participants all across the state. Their health and wellbeing is critical.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 456.

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.