



Testimony in Support of HB 456

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – State Supplement Appropriations February 8, 2022

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Manna Food Center, the designated food bank of Montgomery County, urges your support of HB456, 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/food stamps) to a minimum monthly benefit of \$45 a month. Previous legislation enacted in 2015, which Manna advocated strongly for, showed a commitment to helping Maryland's older adults by increasing the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30 a month. With the rising costs of food, the incoming benefit cliff, and continued burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's time to raise it again to protect and respect Maryland seniors.

As we all know the cost of food has risen at an alarming rate. The United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (USDA ERS) found that average annual food-at-home prices rose 3.5% from 2019 to 2020 and rose an additional 3.5% from 2020 to 2021, both exceeding historical averages.¹ Estimates from USDA ERS forecast an additional 1.5-2.5% rise in food-at-home costs in 2022 and are expected to again surpass historical averages.² While some of this can be attributed to pandemic supply-chain issues, the issue is clear: food costs are rising rapidly. Providing this increase to older adults keeps in step with the rising costs of food so they can continue to access a diet that is critical to their nutritional needs.

During this pandemic, SNAP has become a more powerful means of enabling eligible participants to put food on the table by expanding food budgets. The number of SNAP applications Manna assisted has doubled. This demonstrates how critical this program is as the pandemic persists, and it will continue to be as the state moves through a long road to recovery. With the implementation of the online SNAP program in 2020, SNAP dollars are an important part of our local economy for local businesses whose customers utilize the benefits in store, at farmers markets, and on-line.

Regrettably the economic effects of the pandemic will be felt for years to come, especially among those who were hardest hit by the virus. When the federal public health emergency is lifted, the maximum benefit allotment will end, and many families will have their SNAP benefits recalculated and likely decreased immediately. For example, an older single adult on SNAP currently receives \$250 a month with emergency allotments, but the benefit could drop down to \$30 a month once those allotments end. Increasing the minimum benefit softens the benefit reduction many older adults will see when the pandemic is declared over. Increasing this important benefit helps ensure that our elders can live out their final years with dignity.

Thank you for your consideration, Manna Food Center urges a favorable report on HB 456.

¹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-prices-and-spending/?topicId=1afac93a-444e-4e05-99f3-53217721a8be>

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings/>