

Roberto Melara, Director of the Maryland Region, Capital Area Food Bank
HB323 – Categorical Eligibility and Energy Assistance
Economic Matters Committee
Hearing Date 2/16/2023 at 1pm
Testimony of SUPPORT (2 minutes)

Dear Chairman Wilson and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Capital Area Food Bank, we offer our support for HB323 to expand eligibility and enrollment in social service programs for low-income Marylanders.

The Capital Area Food Bank served over 200,000 food insecure residents in the two largest counties in Maryland, Prince George's and Montgomery. Last year, we distributed over 23 million meals to Maryland clients through a partner network of more than 180 nonprofit organizations and over 150 direct distribution sites.

However, we know that many of our low-income clients are still having to make tough choices on basic necessities, like putting food on their tables or paying their energy bills. While social safety net programs exist to help families meet these basic needs, we often hear from our clients that the application processes are prohibitively complicated, the eligibility thresholds are too limiting, and each program has different requirements for access – all of which keep clients from obtaining the benefits they need and deserve, and often means more clients are standing in line for emergency food from the food bank and our partners.

HB323 helps address some of these program access barriers. It will expand eligibility thresholds and ensure that folks who are already participating in means-tested programs, like SNAP, are automatically considered eligible for energy and utility assistance. This bill will not only increase access and ease application processes for neighbors in need, but it will also remove onerous requirements for agencies enrolling individuals in social safety net programs.

We strongly encourage a favorable report on HB323, and appreciate your consideration. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.