

House Bill 323

Social Services Programs – Eligibility and Enrollment House Economic Matters Committee February 16, 2023

SUPPORT

House Bill 323 allows for direct certification and enrollment in public benefit programs, specifically SNAP enrollment based on SSI eligibility and utility assistance based on SNAP, TANF, SSI, or VA benefits. It also increases the income limit for energy assistance.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of facing food insecurity. Food insecurity means a lack of consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day. Some communities and populations are at a higher risk of food insecurity, including communities of color, older adults, and families with children. There are food insecure Marylanders in every corner of the state.

Public benefit programs are an absolutely essential means for low-income Marylanders to support their families. The Maryland Food Bank alone processed and submitted over 1,100 SNAP applications in FY 22 through our SNAP Outreach Program, and while that is a sliver of the total applications processed across the state, we can attribute almost 1 million meals to our efforts. With the pandemic-era SNAP Emergency Allotments ending, we are bracing for an increase – potentially significantly – in calls for food assistance. Capturing Marylanders who qualify for benefits such as SNAP but might not yet be enrolled will be crucial to easing this burden not only on the Food Bank and our network of community partners but on the most vulnerable of our neighbors who are food-insecure.

Marylanders who live at or below the Federal Poverty Line and qualify for assistance benefit programs are already at risk of economic and financial instability. Those who are food-insecure specifically are rarely hungry in a vacuum and generally have other needs, such as affordable housing or accessible medical care. Ensuring those Marylanders can access the social safety net programs they need and deserve are critical for supporting their families and eventual economic mobility.

For these reasons, the Maryland Food Bank respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 323.