



Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger and promoting well-being

**Testimony in Support of HB323
Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment
House Economic Matters Committee
February 16, 2023**

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice-Chair Crosby, and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee,

My name is JD Robinson. I am the Program Coordinator for SNAP of Maryland Hunger Solutions, a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger in Maryland by improving participation in the federal nutrition programs. Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly supports House Bill 323 – Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment.

This bill has several key provisions, including: automatically enrolling seniors into SNAP if they qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI); streamlining utility assistance enrollment; and expanding access to electricity assistance for low-income families.

Our on-the-ground experience as an authorized SNAP outreach agency for the state of Maryland has given us a unique perspective on this issue. The increased demand for additional assistance programs such as energy and healthcare is reflected in the number of callers on our toll-free hotline requesting referrals or information for these programs. Of the 400-500 calls we field per month, nearly a quarter ask for information on energy, heat, or medical assistance. We believe that providing streamlined pathways to these programs will improve the health and nutrition of thousands of Marylanders.

This bill will also advance an existing program available to SNAP recipients, Heat & Eat. The Heat & Eat program provides a boosted SNAP benefit for households that receive SNAP, receive energy assistance, and pay their utilities through their rent. The effects of the Heat & Eat program have not yet been felt by Maryland families as SNAP emergency allotments have maximized their benefits, but those provisions are ending in March 2023 and hundreds of thousands will see drastically reduced benefits. In Pennsylvania, the Heat & Eat Program provided on average \$60 in additional SNAP benefits per month prior to the pandemic.

Ensuring that all SNAP families that are also categorically eligible for energy assistance receive both programs can help provide additional support to their SNAP benefits at a time when they are needed.

In conclusion, we urge a favorable report for HB 323. Thank you for your time.