



February 7, 2023

2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
HB0111: Categorical Eligibility Enrollment for SNAP

BILL: HB0111: Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children’s Health Program, and Social Services Program - Eligibility and Enrollment

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations

POSITION: Testimony in Support of House Bill 0111

BILL ANALYSIS: Requiring the Maryland Department of Health to establish an Express Lane Eligibility Program to enroll individuals in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and the Maryland Children’s Health program; requiring the Maryland Department of Human Services to enroll individuals, based on certain eligibility, in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program; requiring the Office of Home Energy Programs to enroll individuals, based on certain eligibility, in assistance programs; and generally relating to eligibility for and enrollment in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and social services programs.

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to **SUPPORT** this bill to establish categorical eligibility programs for social services programs, including SNAP, to reduce the burden on Maryland families who have a right to these benefits.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced many families to grapple with issues relating to food affordability and greatly increased the number of people reliant on social service programs to help their families. The hunger crisis that developed resulted in record-setting SNAP enrollment rates throughout the state, an over 40% increase in demand amongst regional food assistance providers, and significant supply chain challenges that left grocery store and food bank shelves empty. Supporting this bill to create an express lane eligibility program will help to reduce the burden on families as well as the state of Maryland, and ensure that as many eligible individuals as possible are enrolled in these programs.

The current SNAP application process creates a large barrier to entry for many eligible residents. Language, technology, and other issues have created an enrollment process that is a huge burden on eligible individuals and the state as well. With the scheduled end of Emergency Allotments, the SNAP program is likely to see increased strain. This bill can begin the process of removing some of these burdens by automatically enrolling eligible individuals/families into these vital programs.



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071
mocofoodcouncil.org | info@mocofoodcouncil.org

The use of SNAP dollars is a great benefit to the Maryland economy as a whole. Every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates as much as \$1.80 in local economic activity. With more issues related to climate on the horizon, the SNAP program, and other social services programs are going to continually see increased need and create a bigger burden on a system that is already understaffed. The implementation of categorical eligibility will save the state of Maryland both time and money while allowing resources to be dedicated elsewhere through automatic enrollment and removing the burdensome process that currently exists. It is important that this process is undertaken immediately so that the state of Maryland can be ready for any disturbances that could come in the future.

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 Heat & Eat have not yet been felt by Maryland families as SNAP emergency allotments have maximized their benefits, but those provisions are ending in March 2023. Ensuring that all SNAP families that are also categorically eligible for energy assistance receive both programs can help provide an additional boost to their SNAP benefits.

We strongly support this bill to establish categorical eligibility for social services programs. The SNAP program, as well as many other social service programs, are a vital part of the Maryland economy and as we continue to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic these programs will continually be relied upon by the state's most vulnerable residents. Express lane eligibility enrollment will allow the state to save time and money and rededicate resources elsewhere while also greatly benefiting residents of Maryland and the Maryland economy. The implementation of categorical eligibility is an opportunity to help Maryland's most vulnerable residents, boost the Maryland economy, and continue to create safety nets for any future issues the state might face. **For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports HBo111 and urges a FAVORABLE REPORT for this bill.**

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Massa Cressall, Interim Executive Director, at the email and phone number below.



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071
mocofoodcouncil.org | info@mocofoodcouncil.org