

**Testimony in Support of HB 666
Omar Marroquin, Crossroads Community Food Network
February 6, 2024**

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

My name is Omar Marroquin, and I'm the Farmers Market Program Manager at Crossroads Community Food Network in Takoma Park. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 666 - SNAP State Supplement.

The State Supplement would raise the minimum to \$95 per month. SNAP generates business for food retailers of all types and sizes, and for the past 17 years it's used at farmers markets like Crossroads Farmers Market. We support this bill because it will help reduce food insecurity among SNAP-users in our community and support the local farmers and vendors in our network.

SNAP redemption at farmers markets has increased dramatically over the past 17 years. This is largely due to the rise of incentive programs that match SNAP dollars spent at farmers markets. This kind of "double-dollar" program, now at hundreds of markets across the country, started right here in Maryland at Crossroads Farmers Market. It was founded in 2007 to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to the Takoma/Langley Crossroads, a primarily immigrant community that straddles the line between Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. It was the first farmers market in Maryland to accept SNAP benefits and the first in the country to match them dollar for dollar. At CFM, shoppers who use SNAP can now receive up to \$50 each week in incentives, called Fresh Checks, to spend with the 22+ small local farmers and vendors on more fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Fresh Checks program at Crossroads Farmers Market is founded on a simple idea: make fresh fruits and vegetables more affordable, and people will buy them. When the market first started, it was a radical experiment; nobody knew if it would work. But the program has grown significantly: in 2007, about \$7,000 in Fresh Checks was distributed to 100 community members; last year, almost 2,000 people received more than \$90,000 in Fresh Checks, matching what they spent using SNAP, WIC, and other federal nutrition benefits. Over the last 17 seasons, nearly 25,000 individuals, families, and seniors spent over \$970,000 in federal nutrition benefits at Crossroads Farmers Market and received another \$970,000 in Fresh Checks dollars to spend on even more fresh fruits and vegetables. In 2022, we secured a federal grant that matches \$60,000 per year in SNAP purchases at Crossroads Farmers Market and the Takoma Park-Silver Spring Coop, which

makes fresh healthy fruits and vegetables more accessible to SNAP users - its open 14 hours per day, 362 days per year, and sources from Maryland farmers to stock its produce department.

At Crossroads, we see firsthand how programs that incentivize consumption of locally grown, fresh produce offer both health benefits to low-income communities and economic benefits to local farmers. Our shoppers can bring home twice as much healthy food, local farmers gain new customers and increase sales, and more food dollars stay in the local economy.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill, and for your efforts to ensure every Maryland resident is food secure. Crossroads Farmers Market urges a favorable report on House Bill 666.