
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 666
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - State Supplement
Appropriations Committee
February 6, 2024

Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriation Committee, my name is Allie Serrine, and I am a member of the graduate student coalition Social Work Advocates for Social Change at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. I am writing in strong support of HB 666. **This bill would raise the minimum SNAP benefit in Maryland from \$40 per month to \$95 per month via the State supplement benefit and would eliminate the age requirement for receiving the State supplemental SNAP benefit.** SNAP benefits are essential for low-income individuals and families to attain food security, and they have a positive impact on the economy. I have seen first-hand the burden of food insecurity on Marylanders, and I believe everyone in our state deserves to know how they will obtain their next meal.

HB 666 would benefit hundreds of thousands of Marylanders - and Maryland's economy as a whole. In December of 2023, 693,715 Marylanders received SNAP benefits, about one in nine people.¹ In Maryland, over 70% of SNAP households are families with children, older adults, or adults living with a disability.² Increasing the State supplemental benefit for SNAP – and expanding it to all households – increases the economic security of low-income families trying to keep food on the table.³ It is crucial to pass this bill now as inflation and overall costs are increasing. Low-income families are especially burdened by rising grocery costs.

SNAP benefits not only provide support for low-income households, but they also help to boost the local and national economy: **the U.S. Department of Agriculture has estimated that every \$1 spent in SNAP benefits will generate \$1.50 in the economy.**⁴ Local farmers especially benefit from funding SNAP programs. In 2021, \$59 million in

Department of Human Services. 2024. SFY 2024 All Programs Report – FIA.
<https://dhs.maryland.gov/documents/Data%20and%20Reports/FIA/Statistical%20Reports/SFY-2024-All-Prg-MoStat-Public-Web-w-Charts-data-through-December-2023.pdf>

² University of Maryland School of Social Work. June 2023. Maryland SNAP Households - 2022.
<https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/Maryland-SNAP-Households,-2022.pdf?&>

³ US Inflation Rate Calculator. 2024. Current US Inflation Rates: 2000-2024
<https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/current-inflation-rates/>

⁴ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. February 2023. A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by-State Fact Sheets. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets>

SNAP benefits were spent at farmers markets.⁵ Buying fresh, local fruits and vegetables contributes to positive health outcomes and reduces healthcare costs. On average, low-income individuals receiving SNAP benefits have about 25% decreased healthcare costs compared to peers who do not receive SNAP.⁶ Increasing the minimum SNAP benefit to \$95 per month supports the economic well-being of farmers and health outcomes for low-income Marylanders.

No one should have to question when they are going to be able to eat again, and far too many individuals and households are struggling to afford to feed themselves and their families. Last year, my internship through the Maryland School of Social Work was at the Baltimore City location of Chase Brexton, a 501(c)(3) non-profit medical center that provides a range of clinical services, including social work support. In the Social Work department, I worked with dozens of clients who received SNAP benefits but also needed additional food resources, as the benefits they received were not enough to cover their grocery costs. I would often bring them to Chase Brexton's food pantry, give a \$50 gift card to Safeway, and provide them with the names and phone numbers of additional food pantries to go to for food. Since Chase Brexton had limited resources, it was a policy that we could only bring clients to the food pantry once a week and give food gift cards once every 6 months. There were countless times that I wasn't able to provide a client with the food assistance they needed, while knowing they didn't have enough in SNAP benefits to feed themselves for the rest of the month. Raising the minimum SNAP benefit amount is one crucial step in the right direction of providing Marylanders with the resources they need to feed themselves and their families.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on HB 666.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁵ Farmers Market Coalition. 2022. Farmers Market Facts & Figures. <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Farmers-Market-Facts-Figures-2022.pdf>

⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. January 2018. SNAP Is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-is-linked-with-improved-nutritional-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>