



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

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Favorable – HB 666

Human Services – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – State Supplement Hearing of the House Appropriations Committee, February 6, 2024

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The Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc. (HPRP) is a non-profit civil legal services organization that provides free legal representation to people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness on legal issues that will lead to an end to homelessness. HPRP regularly represents individuals and families in accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits through administrative appeals and advocacy. HPRP has represented clients who only receive \$23 per month in SNAP, which is extremely difficult for families and individuals to afford food. HPRP strongly supports HB 666 because it would increase the minimum SNAP benefit to \$95 dollars a month and improve food security in Maryland.¹

Increased SNAP benefits allows households to purchase more nutritious foods, resulting in improved health outcomes and prevention and management of chronic health conditions.

Adequate nutrition, made possible through increased SNAP benefits, can lead to better health outcomes for families and individuals. Adults in households with less food security are likelier to purchase more affordable and less nutritious foods. Households with very low food security are more likely to have a chronic illness.² Maintaining a healthy diet is crucial for handling chronic health issues like diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases. SNAP benefits can aid individuals dealing with chronic conditions by allowing them to afford the essential dietary adjustments and prescribed foods.³ Since healthier foods tend to be higher in cost, the increase in HB 666 will allow people to purchase more fresh produce and other healthier food options, in turn improving health outcomes.⁴ Additionally, an increased SNAP benefit would also reduce the stress linked to issues of food insecurity.⁵

Increasing SNAP fosters dignity and equity, emphasizing that nutrition is a basic human right. The increase in the minimum SNAP benefit is promoting the human right to adequate food, recognized by the United Nations.⁶ The right to adequate food emphasizes the elements of availability, accessibility in economic and physical ways, and adequacy, meaning that the food

¹ Currently, the minimum SNAP benefit is \$23 for people 61 and younger, and \$40 for people 62 and older. See MD Code, Human Services, § 5-501(d).

² 37% of adults in households with high food security (“access to nutritious foods at all times during the year”) are likelier to have a chronic illness versus 53% of adults in households with very low food security (“one or more household members skip meals or otherwise eat less at some point during the year because they lack money”). See Carlson & Keith-Jennings, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *SNAP is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs* (2018)., citing Gregory and Coleman-Jensen, “Food Insecurity, Chronic Disease, and Health Among Working-Age Adults,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, July 2017. Available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-is-linked-with-improved-nutritional-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs#:~:text=SNAP%20serves%20a%20vital%20role.enough%20food%20on%20the%20table>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Fact Sheet No. 34, *The Right to Adequate Food* (2010). Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-no-34-right-adequate-food>.

must satisfy dietary needs and contribute to development.⁷ More than 60% of SNAP participants in Maryland are in families with children, more than 38% are in families with older adults and differently-abled members, and more than 36% are in working families.⁸ These populations frequently encounter heightened difficulties in access to nutritious foods. The increase would mitigate these disparities, promoting equity by offering extra support to the most vulnerable. A compassionate society must offer support to those facing economic hardship. Enhancing SNAP benefits guarantees that individuals and families possess the resources to fulfill their essential nutritional needs, fostering a sense of dignity by addressing a fundamental aspect of human rights. With an increase to the minimum benefit in HB 666, families and individuals will be better able to control their food decisions, actively participating in choices that impact their lives.

Increasing SNAP benefits is a compassionate anti-poverty policy, as well as a fiscally sound strategy. The short-term costs are outweighed by long-term economic gains and improved individual and community public health. **HPRP strongly urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 666.** If you have any questions, please contact Claudet Miranda, Economic Justice Paralegal, at cmiranda@hprplaw.org and (410) 801-6305.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Hall & Nchako, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by-State Fact Sheets* (2023). Available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Maryland>