

**House Appropriations Committee
February 6, 2024**

**House Bill 666 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - State Supplement
SUPPORT**

The National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD) Committee on Aging strongly supports HB 666, because we believe every Marylander deserves to have access to a healthy, nutritious diet. This bill will increase the minimum amount of supplemental SNAP benefits that the State will provide, regardless of the ages of household members.

HB 666 will result in enhancements to SNAP, an effective program that promotes food security, generates economic activity, and fosters well-being. This bill will strengthen Maryland SNAP benefits and result in an even more effective food safety net for Maryland residents who struggle to meet monthly living expenses and meet their household's nutritional needs adequately.

This is particularly important because food insecurity is widespread in Maryland. In 2021, the Maryland Food Bank estimated that approximately 39% of households in our state were likely to be food insecure. This problem is worsened by the painful rise in food prices. Grocery prices rose by 23.5 percent from February 2020 to May 2023, while average hourly wages of private-sector workers rose only 17.1 percent.

In addition, the monthly costs in Maryland for housing and utility expenses are high and challenge SNAP recipients to pay for basic needs. Maryland is one of the top ten states for highest cost of utility services. The increase in SNAP benefits will assist in the monthly budgeting challenge that these households will face in 2024.

HB 666 will repeal the minimum age that a member of a household must be for eligibility for a State-provided supplemental benefit under the SNAP and increase the amount of the supplemental benefit that the state must provide from \$40 to \$95. These changes can ease the untenable choices too many families with children have to make between paying for food or paying for shelter, and that too many older adults and people with disabilities must make between paying for food or paying for medicine.

Food insecurity can have devastating effects on individuals of all ages. Lack of access to nutritious food has been associated with increased risk of many health conditions, including

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diabetes, obesity, heart disease, mental health disorders and other chronic diseases. These conditions could cost Maryland \$35.7 billion in medical costs and an extra \$14.1 billion annually in lost employee productivity.

We support this bill because we believe it will strengthen SNAP for over 670,000 Marylanders who rely on this vital program for food. HB 666 is a crucial step in improving food security for Marylanders who struggle to afford sufficient food to meet their nutritional needs.

We ask that you give a favorable report on HB 666.

Respectfully,

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