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## HB 543

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Seniors – State Supplement

#### Hearing of the House Appropriations Committee

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1:00 PM

## FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC supports HB 543**, which would increase the amount of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefit that the State is required to provide for a household that includes an individual who is at least 62 years old from a minimum of \$40 to \$75.

**One in three seniors who qualify for SNAP benefits are still food insecure.** In Maryland, nearly 1 of every 4 (24.2%) seniors 65+ are likely to be eligible for SNAP benefits, as they have incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).<sup>1</sup> Despite receiving this assistance, 33.89% of these qualifying seniors aged 50-59 face food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> For households that fall below 200% of the FPL, Maryland has the *nation's 7th highest food insecurity rate* among this age group and 8th highest food insecurity rate among those 60+ (18.69%).<sup>3</sup> In fact, the average Maryland SNAP benefit currently [lags behind the national average](#) (\$211 vs. \$239).<sup>4</sup> HB 543 would address hunger in seniors by increasing the minimum SNAP benefit, which has been proven to reduce food insecurity.

**Seniors face their own unique challenges in maintaining adequate nutrition.** [The CDC reports](#) that roughly one in five (19.3%) of seniors have special dietary needs, further increasing the cost and difficulty of getting

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions & AARP, *Senior Hunger in Maryland* (last visited February 16, 2024), [https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pdf/Senior\\_hunger\\_fact\\_sheet\\_OFFICIAL.pdf](https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pdf/Senior_hunger_fact_sheet_OFFICIAL.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, *SNAP Household State Averages for SNAP Benefits FY2018*, (last visited February 16, 2024), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP-household-state-averages>.

appropriate food.<sup>5</sup> Food insecure adults are 27% less likely to be in excellent or very good health, over 5 times more likely to suffer from depression, almost 2 times as likely to be diabetic, and more than twice as likely to have at least one ADL limitation.<sup>6</sup> Access to adequate nutrition is vital to the health of Maryland's senior citizens. **HB 543, if passed, would help improve the health outcomes of low-income seniors in Maryland and raise SNAP to a level for seniors that is more responsive to rising food costs and enable access to healthier food options.**

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 543**. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. If you have any questions, please contact David Reische at 410-625-9409 x 277 or [reisched@publicjustice.org](mailto:reisched@publicjustice.org).

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<sup>5</sup> CDC, *Special Diets Among Adults: United State, 2015-2018* (November 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db389.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions & AARP, *Senior Hunger in Maryland* (last visited February 16, 2024), [https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pdf/Senior\\_hunger\\_fact\\_sheet\\_OFFICIAL.pdf](https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pdf/Senior_hunger_fact_sheet_OFFICIAL.pdf).