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## MARYLAND ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS



**Date:** March 4, 2024

**Bill:** House Bill 0543 (SB 0722) – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Seniors

**Sponsor:** The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair  
House Appropriations Committee

**Committee:** Appropriations Committee

**Position:** **SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Ben Barnes and House Appropriations Committee,

The Maryland Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND) represents about 900 Registered and Licensed Dietitian-Nutritionists in the state. MAND appreciates the opportunity to comment on HB0543 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for Seniors. Licensed Registered Dietitian-Nutritionists work in many different types of facilities including hospitals, schools, supermarkets, and long term care facilities, among others. Our mission is to educate the citizens of Maryland on the health implications of good nutrition with evidenced based information.

According to a 2018 report of the Maryland Food Bank, ~15% of Maryland’s population is age 65 and older, and of these, 5.5% are food insecure.<sup>1</sup> This means that nearly 45,000 senior citizens in Maryland face hunger on a regular basis. While these numbers are below the national average, 1 in 20 senior citizens is still far too many. House Bill 0543 (SB 0772) seeks to increase the minimum amount of the SNAP benefit for Seniors provided by the State from \$40 per month to \$75 per month for those who are eligible. We do understand there is a cost to the State associated with this bill, but there is evidence to show that there are also increased healthcare costs associated with food insecurity and/or malnutrition in seniors.

There are many well-known and severe consequences associated with food insecurity among seniors, especially given their already increased risk for acute and chronic health conditions.<sup>2</sup> A 2021 Feeding America report stated food insecure seniors were more likely to have statistically lower nutrient intakes (by 8-24%) and worse health outcomes. Namely, food insecure seniors were 74% more likely to be diabetic, ~3 times more likely to suffer from depression, 19% more likely to have high blood pressure, 71% more likely to have congestive heart failure, and 64% more likely to suffer a heart attack.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mdfoodbank.org> Senior Hunger in Maryland a Growing Concern, June 1, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Assoumou BOMT, Coughenour C, Godbole A, McDonough I. Senior food insecurity in the USA: a systematic literature review. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2023:1-17.

<sup>3</sup> Ziliak, James P., and Craig Gundersen. "The Health Consequences of Senior Hunger in the United States: Evidence from 1999-2016 NHANES." *Report submitted to Feeding America* (2021).

Furthermore, being food insecure decreases quality of life as the ability to independently perform typical Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) diminishes. ADLs examples include everyday activities such as getting in and out of bed, being able to use the bathroom alone, walking, and feeding oneself. Research suggests food insecure seniors are 31% more likely to report at least one ADL limitation compared to older adults who are food secure.<sup>3</sup> Individuals with ADL limitations would presumably have a hindered ability to continue to live independently and could ultimately further degrade quality of life.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, greater food security and nutrition was associated with better outcomes in seniors. A 2021 study looking at over 100,000 participants aged 65 and older dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid (n=115,868 persons included, n=5093 (4.4%) enrolled in SNAP) found that in the 22 month study follow-up period, SNAP enrollment was associated with fewer inpatient hospitalizations, emergency department visits, and long-term care admissions, as well as less money spent on Medicaid payments (with an average savings of \$2360 per person per year).<sup>5</sup>

We write in support of House Bill 0543 (SB 0772) which increases the minimum amount of the SNAP benefit for Seniors. MAND believes the increased SNAP benefit for seniors will help improve the health, wellbeing, and quality of life for seniors in Maryland and may ultimately, help to reduce healthcare costs in the long-run. **MAND therefore respectfully asks for a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 0543.**

Thank you for your consideration,

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<sup>4</sup> Rasheed, S., & Woods, R. T. (2013). Malnutrition and quality of life in older people: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Ageing Research Reviews*, 12(2), 561-566.

<sup>5</sup> Berkowitz SA, Palakshappa D, Rigdon J, Seligman HK, Basu S. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation and health care use in older adults: a cohort study. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2021;174(12):1674-1682.