



January 16, 2024

2024 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
SBoo35: SNAP State Supplement

BILL: SBoo35: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - State Supplement

COMMITTEE: Appropriations

POSITION: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0035

BILL ANALYSIS: Repealing the minimum age that a member of a household must be for eligibility for a State-provided supplemental benefit under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; and increasing the amount of the supplemental benefit that the State must provide from \$40 to \$95.

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to SUPPORT the SNAP State Supplement Bill, which will increase the minimum benefit available to residents enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to \$95.

As the state continues to grow and recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic it is clear that Maryland residents need more support. With increased costs for food and other household goods it is an important time to uplift and ease the burden for residents to get the food they need. Currently, the minimum SNAP benefit is \$23 a month for a household of up to two people. Individuals over 62 receive a state supplement bringing their minimum benefit up to \$40. In neither case is this minimum benefit sufficient to meet the needs of Maryland residents experiencing food insecurity.

As a state-funded SNAP Outreach Organization, MCFC has assisted thousands of Montgomery County residents attempting to navigate the SNAP enrollment process. In the past year, we have seen an increase in the number of individuals and families struggling because of rising food costs due to inflation and the end of COVID-era relief like the SNAP Emergency Allotments. The magnitude of these issues was documented in a recent



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report examining the Self-Sufficiency Standard in Montgomery County, i.e, the amount of income needed to support the basic needs of a family. This report found that a single parent with one preschool-aged child in Montgomery County needs to earn \$91,674 to cover the basic necessities of food, housing, child care, healthcare, and transportation without any financial assistance.¹

We regularly hear from clients about the insufficiency of the minimum SNAP Benefit. Many of these individuals are seniors, or adults with disabilities and chronic illness, who only receive the minimum SNAP benefit because their fixed income is at the limit of SNAP eligibility. Monthly budgets are eaten up by the high cost of housing and past-due medical expenses, and the minimum SNAP benefit is not enough to help cover the cost of healthy foods. Many state the minimum amount is not worth the time and effort needed to maintain their benefits.

We also hear from many working families who face similar struggles. MCFC regularly assists single working parents, who may not be eligible for SNAP themselves, but seek benefits for their SNAP-eligible children. Again, their income is just low enough to qualify for SNAP and far below the \$91,000 they would need to cover household costs in Montgomery County. The \$23 dollars they receive each month is not enough to cover the rising cost of groceries, and these families are still forced to make difficult choices between purchasing nutritious foods and meeting other essential needs.

Furthermore, the inadequacy of SNAP benefits has placed an unsustainable burden on community based organizations providing food assistance. In 2023, MCFC hosted a series of Listening Sessions with food assistance providers to ascertain the state of food insecurity in the county and the capacity of community based organizations to meet the needs of County residents. The fifty participating organizations consistently reported that the number of residents seeking food and other services remains high. Demand at distribution events and food pantries has matched levels experienced during the height of the COVID crisis and, in many cases, has increased above COVID levels. These community organizations specifically cited the high cost of living, nationwide inflation and decreases in federal nutrition program benefits as the cause of increased attendance.

¹ [The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Montgomery County, Maryland 2023](#), Prepared for the Montgomery County Community Action Agency by the University of Washington, September 2023



As a result of these increases, providers expressed that they are unable to meet the food assistance needs of their communities. Some providers are running out of food during distributions and are having to turn residents away. Some are changing their programs to stretch resources, such as by reducing the amount of food provided to each household during a distribution, not taking on new clients, or switching from drive through distributions to an appointment system. Clients are also having to wait longer to receive services such as food/meal delivery, which is needed by seniors, residents with young children, and those without transportation.

Enacting this legislation is a necessary step towards alleviating poverty in Maryland and increasing access to healthy foods. It will support the self-sufficiency of Maryland families and alleviate the burden of community organizations trying to fill the safety net gaps. For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council **supports Senate Bill 0035 and urges a FAVORABLE REPORT for this bill.**

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Michelle Caruso, Director of Policy and Partnerships, at the email and phone number below.



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