

HB 1434**Department of Human Services - Electronic Benefits Transfer Cards - Restoration of Benefits**

Finance Committee

March 21, 2024

Oppose

Catholic Charities of Baltimore opposes HB1434, which would effectively eliminate SNAP benefits for families whose benefits are stolen due to EBT skimming and cloning in the absence of sufficient funds being appropriated in any given fiscal year, and would jeopardize children's and families' access to food, a situation that no Marylander, in this day and age, should have to face.

For over a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany and advocate on behalf of Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

We continue to be alarmed to hear from folks we work with who have had their benefits - SNAP, TCA, and TDAP – stolen due to EBT skimming and cloning. The low-income Marylanders on these programs use their benefits to meet their families' basic needs, and we strongly urge DHS and the State to work with advocacy groups to find effective solutions to the problem of EBT card theft, to reduce the amount of funds needed for reimbursement due to stolen benefits. Just like dollars are quickly replaced when folks have their credit card number stolen, we must rapidly replace benefits for low-income families when their monthly income has been stolen. Without replacement, families are forced to survive the remainder of the month without adequate food and income. Reimbursement of those funds cannot be optional or discretionary, as people's lives depend upon having ready access to food and nutrition.

We know that there are significant budgetary challenges this year, and we expect there will be such challenges in the future. But the solution to this problem is not to deny people benefits that they qualify for and use to survive, or have reimbursement dependent upon adequate guesswork in determining the amount to appropriate in any given year. Rather, we must work together to find solutions to the theft problem, and recognize our obligation to help our neighbors in need, by finding ways to ensure access to food and other basic necessities. **We would support the amendments proposed by the Public Justice Center, including the creation of a workgroup, while striking the bill language in its entirety and leaving the current law in place that requires replacement of stolen benefits.**

We share the frustration and sorrow of the families we work with who are struggling to secure and maintain benefits, and we stand committed to continue working together with the Department and other SNAP partners to create a state where any Marylander who needs safety-net assistance can access benefits in a dignified, expedient, and supportive manner.

Accordingly, we oppose HB 1434 and urge an unfavorable report.

Submitted by Val Twanmoh, Senior Advisor for Advocacy and Policy