

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1458
State Supplemental SNAP for Refugees and Asylees
House Appropriations Committee
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Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Tahirih Justice Center (Tahirih) is a non-profit legal advocacy organization that, since 1997, has been serving immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other abuses. Since 2010, Tahirih Justice Center's Baltimore office has been at the forefront of advocating for immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault in Maryland.

We write in strong support of HB 1458.

HB1458 provides a targeted, time-limited solution to fill a gap created by recent federal changes that removed SNAP eligibility for certain legally present newcomers, including refugees and asylees. These individuals did not lose eligibility due to any wrongdoing or change in lawful status; rather, they were affected by federal policy changes and administrative delays in the green card adjustment process.

This bill does not create a broad new benefit. It preserves food assistance only for a clearly defined group who were previously eligible and only until they complete the federal adjustment process. The Department of Human Services will administer and verify eligibility under existing SNAP standards, ensuring appropriate guardrails and accountability.

As a direct service provider to immigrant survivors throughout Maryland, Tahirih has seen how food security supports job stability, school attendance, and obtaining self-sufficiency more quickly. Many of Maryland's humanitarian newcomers arrive ready to work and contribute; maintaining basic nutrition during their initial months here strengthens our workforce and local communities.

Our client G, an asylee, benefited from SNAP services for herself and her family. The benefit allowed her a level of stability while she spent months looking for lawful employment that fit her skillset and needs. G reported that without those benefits

she is unsure how she would have met her family's food needs during those months, and loss of the benefit would have likely delayed her entry into the workforce.

These benefits are particularly important for immigrant survivors, who face unique barriers to accessing services and for whom the journey to justice and safety is often long. In our work, we have observed many immigrant survivors who struggle to seek justice and personal healing due to the burden of unmet basic needs, which often arise because of the crime and abuse they have suffered. Food insecurity is one of the most commonly named unmet basic need we've observed in our work with immigrant survivors. Hunger, and the stress of worrying whether your children will have enough to eat, creates a constant state of crisis that makes the long-term work of healing and legal advocacy nearly impossible to navigate. Food insecurity also increases vulnerability to exploitation by and dependence upon harm doers, putting immigrant survivors at greater risk of re-traumatization. In fact, a survey study by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence found that nearly 80% of respondents reported most domestic violence victims they work with rely on SNAP to help address their basic needs and to establish safety and stability. Being able to rely on SNAP benefits provides a foundational safety net that allows survivors to pivot from mere survival to sustainable healing and active participation in their pursuit of justice.

Many families in our community are working, paying taxes, and filling vital roles in our workforce, and contributing to the vibrancy and safety of our neighborhoods yet face new barriers created by federal policy changes and processing delays. HB1458 restores access to an essential safety net for immigrant survivors and other vulnerable neighbors. HB1458 reflects Maryland's longstanding commitment to practical and humane solutions that decrease survivor vulnerability and support families working toward stability while protecting the state's economic and community interests.

Tahirih Justice Center urges the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 1458.