



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1458

State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Refugees and Asylees – Establishment

House Appropriations Committee

March 17, 2026

Manna Food Center strongly supports HB 1458 – State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Refugees and Asylees – Establishment, which aims to safeguard Maryland's food assistance networks and local food systems by catching families and individuals falling through newly created SNAP gaps based on changes to SNAP eligibility. The establishment of such a program has the potential to buoy Maryland's food systems through current and anticipated future shocks to food assistance needs and charitable provision capabilities.

Manna Food Center has served residents in Montgomery County, Maryland, since its humble beginnings in a vacant elementary school in 1983, serving just a few hundred recipients with a single pledge of \$3,100, and a donation of 16,000 pounds of food. In 2025, 42 years later, Manna reached 176,156 neighbors through our Food for Families program, and distributed 3.14 million pounds of food, while purchasing over 224,644 pounds of produce from 33 local farms for redistribution to 70 beneficiary organizations. In 2025, Manna helped our neighbors submit 237 SNAP applications and 137 redeterminations, and organized 66 SNAP outreach events with our community-based organizational partners.

US Census data reports that as of 2024, 33.6% of persons living in Montgomery County were foreign-born, and that 43% persons over age of 5 in our county speak a language other than English at home. Manna operates dedicated programming to serve our county's diverse immigrant population, such as our grocery voucher program which saw 7,153 vouchers redeemed in 2025, and infused \$356,450 into local businesses serving culturally-specific groceries.



As these statistics demonstrate, Manna's programs weave through various facets of civic life, creating a robust and dynamic community among all who feel that Montgomery County is their home – no matter how long they have been here or where they come from. We are alarmed by the effects of changes to SNAP eligibility on many of the communities we serve.

In July 2025, federal policy permanently narrowed SNAP eligibility for humanitarian entrants. As a result, refugees, asylees, survivors of human trafficking, certain survivors of domestic violence (VAWA self-petitioners), individuals granted withholding of removal, and parolees, including certain Afghan and Ukrainian humanitarian parolees, are no longer eligible for federal SNAP unless and until they adjust to lawful permanent residence.

Compounding this loss, USCIS imposed sweeping adjudication holds throughout 2025: first a blanket, short-term pause on all refugee and asylee green-card (I-485) cases in March – April 2025, then a November 2025 directive pausing refugee adjustments for those admitted between January 20, 2021 and February 20, 2025 pending re-review, and a December 2, 2025 policy memo placing additional holds on many benefit requests (including I-485s) for nationals of 19 'high-risk' countries whose applications require enhanced vetting. These decisions and their resultant delays are procedural and agency-driven – not applicant-driven. HB1458 simply preserves the nutritional support Marylanders in these categories were eligible for on July 3, 2025, until they complete the federal adjustment process.

It is critical that Maryland creates this safety net for state residents losing SNAP eligibility in order to ensure that communities can continue to receive nutritional support, and to protect and stabilize local food assistance networks. Manna Food Center is now serving more than 10,000 families each month – up from 6,600 just a short while ago – due to growing need after the government shutdown and massive federal job losses impacting our region. Food insecurity in Montgomery County has risen from 27% to 34% between 2023 and 2025, and over 40% of adults in the county reported that their finances are



worsening. Food insecure households in Montgomery County are experiencing forced trade-offs between food and other essential expenses like transportation and housing. Enabling refugees and asylees to receive state SNAP will help sustain our overburdened social safety net through turbulent times, and maximize our ability to meet increasing community need.

Moreover, taking this pivotal step could combat widespread fear of applying to state and federal entitlement programs due to rising uncertainty on regulations, data usage, and eligibility. When the Trump administration implemented a public charge regulation in 2020 targeting a limited number of lawfully present immigrants applying for green cards, the chilling effect extended far into communities of immigrants with documentation and U.S. citizens. 3 in 10 low-income families avoided seeking help and care for which they qualified under federal law. We hope that the establishment of this state SNAP program can reduce the chilling effects unfolding across communities entitled to food assistance, protect the economic stimulation that such programs create, and cushion food assistance provision networks as organizations like Manna stretch as much as possible to reduce the expanding food insecurity in our region.

Manna's community partners across a variety of our programs shared the following quotes on the importance of passing HB1458.

"I have seen first-hand the effects of SNAP benefits being taken away from our Refugees and Asylees who do not have Green Cards. Food is the basis and foundation for a healthy life and many of these families are still working minimum-wage jobs and assimilating to the US work culture. Without access to essential food benefits, they will struggle to become citizens and grow in the workplace. Studies show that access to nutritional food has a positive impact on the outcome of a person's health outcomes and socioeconomic statuses."

— *Shaun King, Office and Operations Manager,
Community Engagement & Consultation Group*

"As an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo, I have always been deeply passionate about fighting poverty and hunger. In my role at Harvest



Mid-County Hub, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact our work has on the lives of many immigrant families who come each week seeking food for their households. The smiles on their faces bring us immense joy and motivate us, as staff, to continue serving with love, compassion, and respect.

Having come from a war-torn nation where thousands of vulnerable people are displaced every day, I feel a personal connection to the communities we serve here. Supporting these families is, in many ways, like giving back to my own people. It fills me with hope to know that the care and compassion we extend can help restore dignity and provide stability to those who have been given a second chance through immigration.

I respectfully urge you to consider passing this bill. Doing so will make a meaningful difference and bring hope to countless individuals and families striving to rebuild their lives in this land of opportunity."

*— Nina Nelly Mobula, Operations Manager,
Harvest Mid County Hub*

"As a current community partner of Manna, I've seen firsthand how essential support for food security and nutrition is for refugees and asylees in our county, and for the children who are ultimately affected. In my previous work as a rehabilitation counselor, I witnessed just how much vulnerable individuals rely on these supports. All humans deserve to have their basic needs met. Access to healthy food helps our communities grow stronger and healthier, and programs like the Maryland State SNAP would ensure that everyone in our community has the opportunity to thrive."

— Jamie Large, Associate Director of Programs, AAMC LLC

"At a time when SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefit changes are impacting countless immigrant survivors and food insecurity is at an all-time high in vulnerable communities, Tahirih Justice Center was grateful to partner with Manna Food Center to provide Tahirih clients in Maryland with gift cards to help meet food needs.

For Tahirih clients, this partnership came at a perfect time. Our client Brandy*,



who is a VAWA applicant and mother of one, noted that the gift cards allowed her to purchase 2 weeks' worth of groceries for her household. Previously, Brandy would have been eligible for SNAP benefits to support herself and her child now that she's received notice from USCIS that she's qualified for VAWA. But due to changes included in the Reconciliation Bill signed on July 4, 2025, Brandy* is no longer able to access SNAP benefits, stripping her of a crucial resource that many Marylanders rely on.

Unfortunately, Brandy is not alone in navigating this new change that's particularly harmful to survivors. SNAP benefits can be key to achieving financial independence and rebuilding one's life after abuse."

— *Feamma Stephens, Social Services Program Manager,
Tahirih Justice Center
(*Client name is anonymized)*

"Germantown HELP strongly supports a state-funded food and nutritional support for our refugee and asylee neighbors in order to build a stronger and more resilient food system for us all. These people are our neighbors, our friends, and our children's friends."

— *Cindy Majane, Director, Germantown HELP*

"We continue to see the rise in all our Outreach program areas, specifically our Food Pantry Distribution Drive-Through. Our families are hurting and are in need of food assistance. Our Outreach and Mission are here to help the food disparity in our community and especially for the families who have been directly affected by the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" Jobs have been eliminated and our immigrant populations are suffering due to the loss of eligibility for federal benefits. It is everyone's right to have the essentials to care for themselves and their families. It is essential that this assistance is restored specifically for our immigrant population throughout the community."

— *Michelle Stewart-Young, Chair, Outreach & Missions Ministry,
Colesville United Methodist Church*

"I fully support HB1458. I have been privileged to serve clients through the Living Faith Lutheran Church Food Pantry since the beginning of the COVID epidemic.



Every other Tuesday, our food pantry serves up to 200 needy families. It takes 6–8 pounds of food for a family of 4 on a daily basis. We have only been able to provide families with 25–30 pounds of food every 2 weeks. So, it is important that additional food support, such as called for in this bill, be established, given that the federal government has reneged on much its safety net role in providing nutritious food for all residents in need. I know from the gratitude expressed by our clients to our food pantry volunteers how our program feeds their bodies and souls and fuels gratitude and pride in them to be members of our community. Even in affluent Montgomery County, up to 40% of families have experienced food insecurity over the past two years."

— *Dr. Stephen Corbin, Food Pantry Manager,
Living Faith Lutheran Church Rockville*

"At So What Else, we see every day how access to nutritious food shapes the health, stability, and opportunity of families in our community. Refugees and asylees arrive in our country seeking safety and a chance to rebuild their lives, yet many face immediate barriers to food access while they work to establish employment, housing, and stability. Establishing a State SNAP program through HB1458 would provide a critical bridge during this transition, ensuring that newly arrived families can meet their most basic need: putting healthy food on the table.

When refugees and asylees have access to consistent, nutritious meals, children are better able to learn in school, parents can focus on building livelihoods, and families can more quickly become thriving members of our communities. Food security is foundational to public health, economic stability, and community well-being.

Supporting HB1458 is an investment in healthier families and stronger communities. By ensuring that refugees and asylees have access to nutrition support, we affirm our shared commitment to dignity, opportunity, and the long-term health of our entire county."

— *Megan Joe, Executive Director of Hunger Relief, So What Else*



“Supporting HB1458 is about more than just policy; it’s about basic human dignity. For refugees and asylees in our state food security is the foundation of a successful new beginning. When we ensure our newest neighbors have access to the nutrition they need to thrive, we reduce the strain on our local health systems and build a more resilient, productive workforce. A community that eats together, grows together—healthier neighbors make for a healthier county and state. By closing the gap in basic essentials like food, we ensure we truly leave no one behind.”

— **Community Volunteer, We Do Seva Inc.*
*(*Anonymized by request)*

“At AfriThrive, we work closely with immigrant families and see firsthand how refugees and asylees strive to rebuild their lives while navigating barriers to basic food assistance. When federal nutrition support becomes unavailable, many families are left at risk of food insecurity during a critical transition period. Establishing a state-funded SNAP program through HB1458 would ensure that these families have access to healthy food while they stabilize, pursue employment, and contribute to the economic and social vitality of our communities. Supporting food security for refugees and asylees strengthens not only individual families but also the resilience and well-being of our entire region.”

— *Dr Truphena Choti, CEO, AfriThrive*

“It is critical that Maryland establish State SNAP for refugees, asylees and others who are no longer eligible for SNAP nutrition benefits due to their immigration status and changes in eligibility requirements. Many of our neighbors are struggling to put food on the table while living in fear—something many never expected once they made it to the United States. They came here for more opportunities and security—financial, physical, emotional—and now are facing discrimination and loss of critical programs to support their health and wellbeing. Maryland is stronger because of our diversity and the many talents and experiences refugees and asylees bring with them to our communities. A State SNAP program through HB1458 to catch the families and individuals that are falling through the newly created gaps in federal nutrition assistance will ensure that our communities can continue to stabilize, thrive, and achieve food security. In addition, such a program will prevent strain on food assistance providers like MUM that are already stretching to meet growing needs in our communities.”



*— Dayna Brown, Executive Director,
Mid-County United Ministries (MUM)*

"Our school has a large number of immigrant families in our community. Since we are a community school, we are required to complete a needs assessment every five years. This year we completed our needs assessment. The data shows that 43.1% of our families said they need help with food resources. When our families are given access to food that helps improve student attendance as well as academic performance."

— Community School Liaison, MCPS Elementary School

"HB1458 is a vital step toward ensuring that refugees and asylees in Montgomery County are not left behind in their most vulnerable moments. Access to SNAP benefits is not simply about food—it is about restoring dignity, stabilizing families, and giving individuals the strength to rebuild their lives after unimaginable hardship. When people have reliable access to nutritious food, they are healthier, children are better able to learn, and families can focus on work, education, and contributing to their new communities. Food security is also closely tied to public safety and community well-being; when basic needs are met, communities are more stable, cohesive, and resilient. By supporting HB1458, Maryland affirms its commitment to compassion, equity, and the belief that when we lift up those in need, we strengthen the fabric of our entire community."

*— Terry Seamens, Board Member,
Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington*

"As a community partner of Manna, our church provides a monthly food distribution to the community. We see increased need and pressure on families as they struggle stretch a minimal food budget. Although we never inquire about a person's immigration status, we serve many families from other countries. Adequate food and nutrition should be available to all, not just those who are considered "worthy" in terms of their legal status. We urge you to establish a Maryland State SNAP Program HB 1458 to benefit all residents needing nutritional assistance, and that specifically includes refugees and asylees."

— Reverend Laura Batten-Carbaugh, Pastor,



Colesville Presbyterian Church

“State funded SNAP programs for refugees and asylees protect human dignity by preventing hunger, and allows them to focus on securing employment and housing, enabling them to become self-sufficient members of the community.”

— Volunteer, Manna Food Center

“Food security and wholesome nutrition are vital to EVERYONE, and necessary for strong, healthy bodies and minds. We embrace this truth at St. Mark’s, and do all that we are able to, to provide food to all in need, without questioning their immigration status or ethnic origin. As a faith-based organization, we live by the scriptural instruction, “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” Leviticus 19:33-34.

The United States of America is a nation founded by the collective wisdom and strength of persons from many nations — immigrants, and in many cases, refugees and asylees. Maryland, in fact, was established, in the seventeenth century, as a colony to provide refuge for persons who were persecuted in England for practicing the Catholic faith. Refugees and asylees in Maryland (and to Montgomery County) today, come to us in the hope that we will honor our history and provide safe shelter, dignity and respect, and above all, enable them to establish new households in our local communities. We must recognize the importance of food security and nutrition for them and for their children. We must recognize that healthy people are vital to healthy communities!

As a Montgomery County food assistance provider, we welcome persons from many backgrounds, ethnic origins, and all races. They speak many languages and have many different cultural traditions. What they all in common is the urgent need for help with feeding their families, and the need for our compassion and understanding. Changes in federal government programs, coupled with aggressive immigration enforcement, causes fear and uncertainty for them. Yet, the cries of their hungry children and the suffering of those who go without enough to eat, brings them to our doors anyway, with HOPE. A state



funded SNAP program for refugees and asylees, as proposed in HB1458, will help to provide hope and stability them, and some needed relief to food assistance providers, as our budgets are stretched thin.

The Maryland state government, to which I faithfully pay taxes, has before it a bill that I strongly urge our legislature to pass. The official translation of our state motto is "Strong deeds, gentle words." Enactment of HB1458 is the strong deed we require. Faith, hope, charity, and love for all our neighbors, are the gentle words that establish who we are and what we stand for."

— *Janis Smith, Parish Administrator and Food Pantry Coordinator,
St. Mark's Episcopal Church*

"As a community-based food provider serving families across Montgomery County with much needed food, clothing, diapers, and case management, we strongly support House Bill 1458.

Every day, we see firsthand how gaps in eligibility for nutrition assistance place tremendous pressure on families—especially immigrant, refugee, and asylee households—who are working hard to stabilize their lives. We are currently serving over 5,000 households monthly. When these families lose access to federal nutrition benefits, the impact multiplies: it affects children's health, family stability, and overall community well-being.

Establishing a state-funded nutrition assistance program will ensure that these residents—who are an important part of our community—can continue to thrive, contribute, and move toward long-term food security. It will also help community providers like ours sustain operations and reduce strain on already limited local resources.

We believe this bill represents a compassionate and practical step toward building a more resilient and equitable food system for Maryland. Thank you for your leadership in supporting the health and dignity of all who call our state home."

— *Randi Drewry, Outreach Coordinator,
Clifton Park Baptist Church*



"I believe we are called to care for others, just as Jesus instructs us in the Bible, "take care of my sheep." Due to federal government cuts for food assistance, it is the responsibility of the State of Maryland to heed the call and care for others. Manna is one vehicle in Montgomery County for hungry families to receive the food assistance they need both through Manna food pantries and the weekend bag program distributed to students through their schools. But Manna cannot continue their good work providing food to others alone. Please show that our beautiful State of Maryland can show compassion for others by supporting the bill providing state-funded nutrition assistance program. Hungry people depend upon our generosity."

*— Anne Stewart Doane, Volunteer Food Shelver, Donation Collector,
Communicator, Colesville Presbyterian Church*

"Food is one of the basic human needs. Nutritious food for children and adults is critical for their health and wellbeing. Food assistance organizations can't cover the tremendous need on their own. Government help is absolutely necessary so that countless children and adults don't have to face food insecurity. Everyone needs and deserves food notwithstanding their status as citizens, refugees, or asylum seekers. We have a moral obligation to care for others less fortunate."

*— *Executive Director,
Nonprofit supplying emergency food and infant need to local residents
(*Anonymized by request)*

"On behalf of Bayit Community Land Trust, we respectfully submit this statement in support of policies that strengthen access to nutrition assistance for vulnerable residents across Maryland.

Based on our nonprofit's mission to support community stability, housing security, and long-term community stewardship, we recognize that reliable access to nutritious food is a foundational component of healthy and resilient communities. Our organization works with families experiencing food insecurity, housing instability, and economic hardship, and we see firsthand how gaps in



food assistance programs can create serious challenges for households striving to maintain stability.

Policies that ensure access to nutrition support improve community stability, strengthen public health outcomes, and reduce strain on local emergency food providers. When families are able to meet their basic nutritional needs, they are better positioned to pursue employment, education, and housing stability. Strengthening nutrition assistance programs helps ensure that individuals and families are not left without support during periods of transition or eligibility changes.

For these reasons, Bayit Community Land Trust supports policy efforts that expand access to nutrition assistance for populations who may otherwise fall through gaps in federal programs. Ensuring continued access to healthy food contributes to stronger families, healthier communities, and a more resilient food system for all Maryland residents.

Thank you for your continued commitment to policies that address food insecurity and promote community well-being."

*— Eneshal Galloway, Founder/Director,
Educational Sustainability Mobilization Inc.
DBA Essential Now Bayit Community Land Trust*

Tho Tran, CEO at Vietnamese American Services, also signed on in support of this testimony, without additional quotation.

Thank you for your consideration. We ask the committees to make a favorable report on HB 1458.

Sincerely,
Manna Food Center

Craig L. Rice, CEO



240.268.2524

craig@mannafood.org