



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1246

Maryland Department of Health – Employment Training and Opportunity Database

House Economic Matters; Government, Labor, and Elections Committees

March 2, 2026

Manna Food Center strongly supports HB 1246 – Maryland Department of Health – Employment Training and Opportunity Database, which aims to assist individuals in the State with finding and enrolling in employment training and other opportunities that may enable the individuals to become eligible and maintain eligibility for the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This centralized database would also receive recommendations of opportunities that can be included in this database, with a guarantee to update the database every 30 days. The creation of such a database has the potential to reduce the SNAP gap resulting from the changes made in HR1, streamline employment searches, and safeguard Maryland's economy.

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 distributed 3.14 million pounds of food, infused \$356,450 into the local economy, and utilized our novel Farm to Food Bank program to purchase 224,644 pounds of food from 33 farms and farmers markets for distribution to 70 beneficiary organizations.

This farmer and community-engaged work is possible because of a robust, complementary federal and local food assistance ecosystem. Manna also assists members of our community with SNAP applications and enrollment in other local benefits such as MC Groceries. In 2024, as part of SNAP-Ed programming, Manna pre-screened nearly 1,000 households for SNAP, and organized 66 SNAP outreach events with our community-based organizational partners. Ensuring that participation in SNAP



is promoted and protected allows our local food system to remain sustained, and reduces the strain on food assistance organizations such as ourselves that are stretching to meet growing community needs.

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, massive federal job losses, and waning trust in state and federal programs. Food insecurity in Montgomery County (our area of service) 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. Our research indicates that in order to be self-sufficient in Montgomery County, a family of 3 (1 adult, 1 infant, 1 school-going child) would need an income of \$56.81/hour.

Under such conditions, the SNAP work requirement changes articulated within HR1 threaten to destabilize increasingly precarious food assistance provision capacities. In Maryland in 2024, **21,696 veterans** participated in SNAP, **40%** of SNAP households had **older adults**, and **47%** of SNAP households had **children**. Under the new work requirements, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and young adults who aged out of out-of-home care and are under the age of 24, are newly subject to work requirements. Older adults between 54–64 years of age will also now be subject to work requirements. The Maryland Department of Human Services estimates that **79,696** additional individuals will be subject to work requirements, including **18,430 adults in households with children** and **61,226 older adults aged 54–64**.

We believe that these tens of thousands of Marylanders, who may now lose some or all of their SNAP benefits if they are unable to meet the ABAWD work requirements, must receive additional assistance with employment training and other opportunities that will allow them to become eligible and maintain eligibility for the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. By providing the assistance outlined in HB1246, Maryland will be able to safeguard those individuals' participation in SNAP, prevent food assistance provision networks from being overwhelmed by sudden and sharp increases in need, and guarantee that SNAP's critical role in Maryland's economy is shielded, as much as possible, from these drastic changes in the program.



SNAP supports local businesses, including 3,821 retailers in Maryland, which redeemed a total of \$1,929,524,491 in 2023. Retailers include grocery stores and farmers' markets, which contribute to local taxes that fund services like schools and health care. SNAP helped over 256,482 children in Maryland in FY 2023. It also provided these children with eligibility for school meals. Lower participation with SNAP would mean that children in families with low incomes would lose access to school meals. As researchers reported in SNAP Matters: "SNAP [is] the most effective antipoverty program among the non-elderly," reducing rates of poverty, especially for children, more than do other programs.

By creating this employment training and opportunities database, Maryland can successfully promote and protect participation in SNAP, and generate critical pathways towards food security for individuals who utilize the database. This resource will equip SNAP application assistance providers such as Manna with a comprehensive and trustable resource to share with participants in our communities as we support them in navigating changes to their eligibility. For these reasons, we urge the passage of HB1246 – protect SNAP participation, local food systems, food assistance provision networks, veterans, our unhoused neighbors, intergenerational caregivers, former foster youth, and our collective communities, with this critical action.

Thank you for your consideration. We ask the committees to make favorable reports on HB 1246.

Sincerely,
Manna Food Center

Craig L. Rice, CEO
240.268.2524
craig@mannafood.org