



SNAP Helps Feed Nearly 1 Million Marylanders, Reducing Hunger and Increasing Productivity, and Could be Strengthened by the State

Feeding More Marylanders with Stronger SNAP State Policies

Every day, thousands of low-income Marylanders struggle to get enough to eat and feed their families. Hunger is a drag on Maryland's economy, reducing productivity and lowering educational attainment. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the largest federal effort to help nourish needy children and families, helps more than 780,000 Marylanders put food on the table, at very little cost to the state.

Administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), SNAP provides benefits to eligible low-income families that can be used to purchase food. Eligibility and benefit levels are determined by household size, total household income, and expenses such as child care and housing costs. To be eligible for SNAP, a household's:

- Gross monthly income must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty line; for example, \$2,116 for a family of three.
- Net monthly income must be at or below 100% of the federal poverty line; for example, \$1,628 for a family of three.

Those eligible can apply for SNAP in person at their county Department of Social Services office, over the phone, online, or with other authorized outreach groups. Benefits are delivered monthly on an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card and can be used at authorized SNAP retailers including grocery stores, farmers markets, and convenience stores. Many Maryland retailers depend on business from these customers.

In Maryland, SNAP is known as the Food Supplement Program (FSP). The average monthly benefit is approximately \$130. Among those helped are 325,000 children and approximately 70,000 seniors.

The Food Supplement Program is a vital safety net that reduces hunger, improves nutrition and benefits the local economy. The following are recommendations to enhance FSP administration, expand participation and reduce hunger and food scarcity.

Policy Recommendations:

Increase the minimum FSP benefit. The current monthly minimum benefit is \$16. Households receiving the minimum benefit are often seniors living alone and raising it to \$30 could significantly



expand program participation, reduce hunger and improve nutrition statewide. The increase would require the administration to allocate \$3.6 million annually to administer the benefit increase and because FSP benefits would be spent locally on food, they would bolster Maryland's economy, helping to fuel sales and jobs.

Continue investing in technology and infrastructure used to administer benefits. This would allow better coordination, making benefit delivery more effective and the use of government resources more efficient.

Improve coordination of multi-benefit enrollment for low-income residents. State administrators should promote enhanced integration and utilization of policies that strengthen multi-benefit screening and enrollment processes for low-income Marylanders.

Continued support of Maryland's initiative to end childhood hunger by 2015. Build on the work started by the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in Maryland, by ensuring that children enrolled in the Food Supplement Program (and other food programs) are also enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

To learn more, contact Michael J. Wilson, Director, Maryland Hunger Solutions (mjwilson@mdhungersolutions.org) or the Maryland Center on Economic Policy (mdcep@mdeconomy.org).