

FEBRUARY 16, 2016

# Increasing the minimum SNAP benefit would provide relief to struggling Marylanders

*Position Statement Supporting House Bill 445*

*Given before the House Appropriations Committee*

Increasing the minimum monthly benefit for Maryland's nutrition assistance program to a minimum of \$30 per household would help promote economic security for low-income Marylanders struggling to feed their families. For this reason, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 445.

Although Maryland's economy has improved since the Great Recession, many Maryland families still struggle to put food on the table. In 2015, 406,209 Maryland households received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. However, 10.9 percent (44,201 households) received less than \$30 a month and 7.3 percent (29,743 households) received an average of about \$16 a month. Rising food costs in Maryland mean that these minimal benefits do very little to help low-income families afford healthy and nutritious meals.

Ensuring that families can afford to purchase enough groceries allows adults to continue working and helps children focus on learning rather than being hungry in school. Investing in nutrition assistance programs is also good for Maryland's economy. Research shows that every \$5 the state invests in new SNAP benefits generates \$9 in economic activity for participating grocery stores and farmer's markets. By raising the minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$30, the state will be able to foster healthier communities and boost the economy.

In addition to the immediate relief SNAP provides in the form of food assistance, evidence shows it also makes long-term improvements in the lives of individuals and families. Pregnant mothers and children who receive nutrition assistance become healthier, better-educated adults, according to a study of food stamp expansion.<sup>i</sup> Children who get nutrition assistance are more likely to graduate from high school and are less likely in adulthood to have stunted growth and heart disease. They also have lower levels of obesity than those who live in families that are struggling to make ends meet but don't receive SNAP.<sup>ii</sup> Low-income

Marylanders who receive food stamps are therefore more likely to be able to support themselves, which is also good for the state's economy.

House Bill 445 is an important step in helping more low-income families afford to get enough to eat. Currently, 1 in 10 Marylanders struggle to get by on income below the federal poverty line (\$20,090 per year for a family of three). For children, the rate increases to 1 in 8. SNAP has proven to be successful in creating more economic security for these families in need.

**For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Appropriations Committee give a favorable report to House Bill 445.**

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<sup>i</sup> Hilary W. Hoynes, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, Douglas Almond, "Long Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 18535, November 2012, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18535>

<sup>ii</sup> Greenstein, Robert. "Testimony Before the House Budget Committee on Poverty and the Safety Net," January 28, 2014, <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4083>