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Prohibiting SNAP Time Limit Waivers Would Harm 30,000 of Md.'s Poorest Residents

Position Statement Opposing House Bill 533

Given before the House Appropriations Committee

House Bill 533 would place new time limits on food assistance for an estimated 30,000 of Maryland's poorest residents, making it more likely they would go without food some of the time and making it harder for them to get ahead. This bill would unnecessarily create problems within a state programs that is already working well to ensure Marylanders going through a difficult period don't go hungry while they get back on their feet. For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy opposes House Bill 533.

Without a time limit waiver, able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) may only receive food assistance (SNAP) for 3 months out of a 36-month period, unless they are working or participating in qualifying education and training or workfare programs for at least 80 hours per month. Despite improvements in the economy and job market, many Marylanders still struggle to find work. Individuals who are actively looking for a job but haven't found one yet or who are working but aren't getting enough hours can lose much-needed assistance due to the time limit.

The waiver only applies to counties that are experiencing a high unemployment rate. While some Maryland counties have recovered sufficiently to no longer require a waiver, 13 counties still have time limit waivers for ABAWDs: Allegany, Baltimore City, Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester. Forcing these counties to enforce harsh time limits before the local job market has recovered would have significant economic and health implications for these jurisdictions, which still struggle with high unemployment. Worcester County's unemployment rate, for instance, was 11.6 percent in December 2016¹.

The SNAP Education and Training program is expanding in Maryland to help connect more out-of-work SNAP recipients with employment. However, these programs are not yet offered in all areas of the state and may take time to reach people who could lose their food assistance as a result of HB 533.

Further, it is important to note that House Bill 533 would not reduce state expenses – the funding for food assistance comes from the federal government. HB 533 also does not provide any additional resources to assist the state in connecting SNAP recipients with employment, training, and education.

Having a statewide time limit waiver in place was an essential tool to help Marylanders get by during the height of the recession. Prohibiting Maryland counties from using this tool in the future reduces the state's flexibility to address local unemployment, hunger, and poverty issues.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the House Appropriations Committee give an unfavorable report to House Bill 533.

ⁱ Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation - <https://www.dllr.state.md.us/lmi/laus/>