



Testimony in support of HB 698

By Michael J. Wilson

Director, Maryland Hunger Solutions

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, I offer this testimony in support of HB 698, to provide additional funding for employment and training for the certain participants of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

When asked to contribute to the poor, Ebenezer Scrooge famously replied, “Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?” This, Members of the Committee, is the policy underpinning what is known in the SNAP program as the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents provision. Under this provision, enacted as part of the 1996 Welfare Reform act – and after two separate Presidential vetoes – adults between the age of 18 – 50 who are working less than 20 hours a week, who are not designated as “unfit for work” and who don’t have dependents, are limited to receiving SNAP for only three months in a three year period.

The proponents of this policy often refer to the “work requirements” in this policy. They are not work requirements. Most of the SNAP recipients in this category are already working – they just don’t have enough hours or enough income, which is why they are eligible for SNAP. We know that both the state of Maryland and the USDA have acknowledged that they are experiencing poverty and as such are eligible for SNAP. That’s why we refer to them as time limits – not work requirements.

Recent regulatory proposals by the USDA have exacerbated the ABAWD time limits in Maryland. Because of this, and other policy changes initiated in the last year, thousands of Maryland SNAP recipients will lose their benefits, including seniors, families with children and ABAWDs. It will cost Maryland food retailers millions in revenue and will force tens of thousands to suffer more food insecurity.

We are working with Baltimore City – which will likely see between ten thousand and fifteen thousand ABAWDs lose their SNAP benefits in the spring of 2020 – to engage in extra community outreach and communication to ensure that no one loses their benefits unnecessarily.

The legislation before you, HB 698, is meant to provide additional training funds for the between 15,000 and 30,000 ABAWDs who will lose their benefits in 2020. These participants are not just in Baltimore City. They are also in Harford, Allegany, and Garrett counties, as well as the entire eastern shore from Cecil County to Somerset County. The additional million dollars is meant to provide job training, one of the ways in which ABAWDs can keep their SNAP benefits.



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There are, however, two important challenges with the program. The funding would commence in 2022. Our ABAWD problems will be hardest in 2020. This spring and summer is when we need the funding the most – not two years from now.

The other problem is that the way the program is structured is once you lose your SNAP benefits, you also lose access to the SNAP employment and training programs. It's a double whammy; you lose access to both food and job training.

And while Ebenezer Scrooge might think that's a good thing, I am certain that it's not a good thing for our state, or for those who are experiencing poverty.

Thank you for your attention to this testimony and I would be willing to respond to any questions.