



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB101 — HUMAN SERVICES – SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAM – HEAT AND EAT PROGRAM

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup>, 2021

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary source of nutrition assistance for many low-income families and individuals. SNAP enables low-income households to spend more on food than their limited budgets would otherwise allow and makes it easier to put enough food on the table. Households participating in SNAP include low-wage working families, low-income seniors, and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes. Almost 70 percent of participants in an average month are in families with children, and more than one-quarter are in households with seniors or people with disabilities. SNAP forms a critical foundation for their health and well-being, lifting millions out of poverty and improving food security.<sup>1</sup>

“Heat and Eat” is a federal program that more than a dozen states and the District of Columbia already utilize which can boost benefits for SNAP recipients who are also eligible for and receiving energy assistance. The program is designed to address energy assistance for homes as well as for apartments where utility costs are included in the rent. This federal program allows individuals who pay utilities through their rent, but are eligible for utility assistance, to claim the Standard Utility Allowance on their SNAP application, thus increasing their SNAP benefits. By implementing this program, Maryland could provide millions of dollars of additional SNAP benefits to low-income individuals who are eligible for these federal dollars.<sup>2</sup>

This program is especially critical during the Covid-19 Pandemic. By targeting those receiving both SNAP and energy assistance, it lifts those struggling with both food insecurity and energy costs. While food banks and food pantries continue to meet the rising need, SNAP has become a more powerful means of enabling eligible participants to put food on the table by expanding food budgets. With the implementation of the online SNAP program last year, which allows SNAP users to purchase groceries via online retailers, and the incoming Restaurant Meals Program, which allows certain populations to use their benefits at restaurants, SNAP dollars are an

<sup>1</sup> Carlson, Steven, More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food, July 30, 2019; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities;  
<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>;

important part of our local economy. In FY2020 more than a billion dollars in SNAP benefits was spent in Maryland, providing support to grocery stores, farmers markets, and the entire agriculture supply chain.<sup>2</sup>

This bill requires the Maryland Department of Human Services to implement the “Heat and Eat” program in the state, providing a fix to ensure we are bringing in as much federal funds as possible to support food-insecure Marylanders.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB101.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions; <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org>