



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
ON FEBRUARY 10, 2021
BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF HB 101
SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM - HEAT AND EAT
PROGRAM**

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

The Critical Issues Forum: Advocacy for Social Justice (CIF), supports HB 101, the Heat and Eat Program, which expands food access to households that are receiving or eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps) benefits.

Comprised of Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, CIF is a coalition that includes over 1,750 households and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. Jewish tradition explicitly commands that we feed the hungry. For the past five years, CIF has advocated for effective solutions to food insecurity in Maryland for families, children, and seniors, including in SNAP.

HB 101 establishes a Heat and Eat Program in Maryland. This program would prescribe a streamlining practice whereby SNAP recipients who receive over \$21 in utility assistance benefits would receive additional SNAP benefits. This assistance is critically important now, when more than 700,000 Marylanders, or more than 1 in 10 households, live in poverty and struggle against hunger (<https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/hunger2020>). At least ten other states and the District of Columbia have implemented Heat and Eat programs.

Maryland households in public and Section 8 housing that do not pay a separate heating bill but who pay for heating as part of their rent do not ordinarily have the opportunity to use a Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) deduction as part of their SNAP application. Such a deduction could offset income and result in greater SNAP benefits. However, under Section 4006 of Title IV of the federal Agriculture Act of 2014 (Farm Bill), such households may use a SUA if they receive more than \$20 annually in payments under the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981 (LIHEAP). In Maryland, LIHEAP is called the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP).

Maryland has never implemented a Heat and Eat Program that would provide such enhanced SNAP benefits. A 2016 analysis by the Maryland Department of Human Resources determined that under a Heat and Eat Program, 32,690 Marylanders who do not pay a separate heating bill would receive additional food stamp payments. The average increased benefit would be \$59 per household per month, for a total annual expenditure of MEAP funds of \$1.6 million. The collective increase in SNAP benefits would be **\$23.1 million**. Of course, SNAP benefits also have a multiplier effect on the economy (<https://www.towson.edu/campus/partnerships-research/economic-studies/documents/resi-policy-brief-food-insecurity.pdf>).

Thus, a Heat and Eat Program is a win-win. Low-income Maryland residents would receive utility assistance **and** increased SNAP benefits. It would be unconscionable **not** to implement a Heat and Eat Program when Marylanders are suffering the effects of the economic downturn created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers found that Maryland's food insecurity had more than doubled early in the pandemic, Schanzenbach & Pitts (2020), Institute for Policy Research Rapid Research Report, <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documens/reports/ipr-rapid-research-repoarts-pulse-hh-data-1--june-220.pdf>, and the effects have gotten even more severe. Recent Census data shows that of 1,446,000 Marylanders responding, about 88,500 reported they often did not have enough to eat, and about 384,000 reported they sometimes did not have enough to eat. This represents 33% of responding Maryland residents who are food insecure.

Not surprisingly, the number of Maryland households using SNAP has surged from 591,474 in February 2020 to 697,144 in October 2020. Thus, hundreds of thousands of our neighbors rely on SNAP benefits to put food on their family tables and avoid going hungry.

The Critical Issues Forum respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 101, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Heat and Eat Program.