



Senate Bill 787
Human Services - Benefits Cliff Pilot Program - Establishment
Senate Finance Committee
March 16, 2023

Dear Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is JD Robinson. I am the Program Coordinator for SNAP of Maryland Hunger Solutions, a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger in Maryland by improving participation in the federal nutrition programs. For over ten years, MD Hunger Solutions has provided application assistance to any Marylander trying to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP. We provide this service both in-person and over-the-phone, where our toll-free hotline receives 400-500 calls per month from Marylanders seeking assistance.

Maryland Hunger Solutions supports Senate Bill 787, which would establish a Benefit Cliff Pilot Program within the Department of Human Services to help mitigate the effects of the “benefit cliff” and assist those transitioning out of receiving benefits as they join the workforce or increase the hours they work.

Many families and individuals are on a fine line between maintaining eligibility for benefits like SNAP and being cut off. The margin for this is a matter of tens of dollars a month in some cases, where a slight increase in hours worked or even a small wage increase can lead to being disqualified for receiving public benefits. For families that rely on these benefits, this can be a particularly difficult transition as the loss of benefits may not equal the amount of income gained. Establishing a program to provide support during these transitions can ensure a smooth adjustment and more financially stable households.

The “benefit cliff” as mentioned in SB 787 is different from the one that families are currently facing as pandemic-era waivers from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) have expired. The increased SNAP benefit through Emergency Allotments ended this month, with families seeing an average decrease of \$82 a month in their benefits, with some losing hundreds. The loss of the Pandemic-EBT program led to a sharp decrease in benefits for families with school-aged children during the school year and summer.

It is important to note that the pilot program created by this legislation will not be able to provide support to all families affected by the current, larger benefit cliff. However, we can look to examples being set by other states that are providing immediate and long-term aid to families on SNAP as they navigate the sudden decrease in their benefits. Massachusetts has allocated state funds to create a “benefit ramp” by providing 40% of a household’s maximum allotment for 3 months following the end of Emergency Allotments. New Jersey recently increased the



minimum SNAP benefit for all households to \$95 a month, a \$72 increase from the federal minimum of \$23 a month. Maryland can look to both of these states for possible solutions to this cliff.

HB 787 is a step in the right direction for long-term financial wellbeing for Marylanders transitioning out of benefit access. However, more robust and immediate action will be necessary to help families.

In conclusion, we urge a favorable report for SB 787. Thank you for your time.