



Testimony at the House Rules Committee Field Hearing

December 6, 2021

Takoma Park, Maryland

Dear Representatives McGovern, Raskin, and distinguished members of the community.

My name is Michael J. Wilson, and I am the director of Maryland Hunger Solutions, a statewide non-partisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger in the state of Maryland. We do this by working with the federal and state nutrition programs. This includes SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and we are an official outreach partner with the state Department of Human Resources. It also includes school meals: school breakfast, school lunch, after-school meals, summer meals and school snacks. Maryland also has a special state-funded breakfast program, Maryland Meals For Achievement, which helps to fund breakfast in the classroom in low-income schools. It also includes WIC, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children.

The first thing that I want to say is "Thank you". Thank you for recognizing the non-profit organizations and charities who are here today. These are the front-line organizations who are providing emergency assistance and community coordination at the local level. While not governmental agencies, they are providing services and resources in a comprehensive and unprecedented way, and deserve recognition for their great work. In addition, I want to recognize the local government leaders, both here in Takoma Park and in Montgomery County. Their support for these local organizations and their work addressing food insecurity is nothing short of remarkable.

It's important that while we recognize the importance and reach of federal nutrition programs, we also must recognize that we must encourage as much efficiency and effective utilization of the programs as possible. That's why I want to especially recognize the work of the House Rules Committee in addressing prior regulatory changes by USDA which would have had the impact of reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of the programs. By enacting H. Res. 6 and directing the Office of General Counsel to explore legal options for responding to USDA proposed rules regarding able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), the Congress did not just engage in bureaucratic blather. This was a meaningful legislative action which was critical to millions of low-income SNAP participants. It would be unjust for eligible and participating SNAP recipients to lose their benefits because of an inability to find full-time. But to do so in the midst of a

worldwide pandemic is unjustified. Thank you Chairman McGovern, and the Members of the House Rules Committee for highlighting this injustice, and for addressing it in the House of Representatives.

There were other proposed regulations from the USDA during the previous administration which would have negatively impacted SNAP recipients. The suggested changes to the standard utility allowance attempted to nationalize a part of the program where the state and local administration was already working. In addition, the proposed adjustments to prevent the utilization of categorical eligibility would have resulted in preventing states from being thoughtful and efficient in the administration of the SNAP program. Conversely, last year's change by the USDA to move from the Thrifty Food Plan to the Low-Cost Food Plan was a recognition that the Thrifty Plan were insufficient for the needs of low-income participants in 21st century, and that modernization was not only timely, but overdue.

We must also encourage states to fully utilize SNAP. Online SNAP has been a great resource during the COVID-19 pandemic, but instead of being limited to just large retailers, it should be open to more local community businesses. If we permit Amazon to participate, surely we can allow participation from the Takoma Park Silver Spring Co-op. In addition, Maryland has been slow to implement the Restaurant Meals Program which passed the state legislature in 2019, and this is a prime example of how state government inefficiency has resulted in lost opportunities for food access to SNAP recipients and lost opportunities for additional customers for hundreds of potential local restaurants.

Right now, as we sit here in this community center, all of us can hear the sounds of children playing outside. It is as pleasant a sound as we ever hear. It should serve as a reminder that we have responsibility to ensure that those children – and children like them, whether they are in Montgomery County, Maryland or Montgomery, Alabama – have access to healthy school meals. Today, all over the nation, children are getting healthy school meals without being asked to dig into their pockets to pay for ~~their~~ fruit with their breakfasts or ~~their~~ milk with their lunch. We are providing healthy school meals for every student in every school in every community in the nation. To me, and I am certain that everyone in this room would agree, that is as important an investment that we can make as anything else that our government does. Feeding the brains and bodies of our children should be a priority for us all, and we are hopeful that the Congress will agree and pass both Build Back Better and the Child Nutrition Reauthorization and ensure that healthy school meals for all is the law of the land. In the meantime, we will work here in Maryland to do what our colleagues in California and Maine have done, and work to implement state legislation as well. There are 162,680 students in Montgomery County Schools and 43,828 students in Frederick County schools. There is no way for private charities or backpack programs to be able to address the needs of the over 893,000 students in states when over 400,000 of them qualify for free or reduced priced meals. Consider this: a single mom living in Takoma Park, Maryland, where we are right now, may earn \$24,000 a year and still does not qualify for free school meals. \$24,000 a year in Montgomery County, Maryland.

As we sit here today, there are over 854,000 SNAP recipients in the state of Maryland. There are 81,714 here in Montgomery County and 19,371 in Frederick County.

The programs that exist make a world of difference to hundreds of thousands of Marylanders, and to millions of Americans. But on behalf of everyone here – the charities, the non-profits, the local government leaders – I want you to know that the most important thing that we would ask of federal legislators is to legislate. The button that I am wearing says “Vote to End Hunger”. Your leadership and support for federal nutrition programs is the most important thing that we would ask of you. Nothing has the size and capacity of the federal government. If we have the will and utilize the systems ~~that~~ that are before us, we can address hunger and poverty to improve the health and the economy of our nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I would be glad to respond to any questions or comments at this time.