



www.legalaiddc.org
1331 H Street, NW
Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 628-1161

December 19, 2023

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor of The District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Via email

Re: The Administration must raise Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP”) benefits

Dear Mayor Bowser,

Legal Aid DC urges you and your administration to implement the requirements in the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Support Act of 2023 (“BSA”) to increase SNAP benefits. In addition, we urge you to fully fund the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022 in the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget.

The Administration Must Follow the Budget Support Act and Increase SNAP Benefits

At Legal Aid, we represent District residents who rely on SNAP benefits to feed themselves and their families. For many of our clients, these benefits are necessary – but by no means sufficient – to put food on their tables, especially as the cost of food continues to rise.¹ Without a corresponding increase in SNAP benefits, District residents who are struggling to make ends meet will go hungry. The Council recognized the stark reality our neighbors face and made the policy decision to fund an increase to SNAP benefits should revenue become available – a decision to which you agreed by signing the BSA.

Under the BSA,² if the CFO certified that the September 2023 quarterly revenue estimates exceed the revenue estimate dated February 28, 2023, then excess local funds must be allocated and expended as follows:

¹ See U.S. Cities Where Food Prices Have Increased the Most, <https://personalinjurylawcal.com/blog/u-s-cities-where-food-prices-have-increased-the-most/>.

² Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Support Act of 2023 § 7102, https://lms.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/52613/Signed_Act/B25-0202-Signed_Act.pdf?Id=166874.

- (1) The first \$39,612,000 of one-time funds must be allocated to the Department of Human Services (“DHS”) to increase SNAP benefits beginning on January 1, 2024, until September 30, 2024; and
- (2) Up to \$300,000 may be used to update information technology systems supporting the provision of food assistance benefits.

On September 29, 2023, the CFO certified that the District had the revenue necessary to fund the temporary SNAP increase.³ Despite the certification triggering enhanced SNAP benefits, on December 4, 2023, Deputy Mayor Wayne Turnage testified at a DC Council Roundtable held jointly by the Housing and Health Committees that the SNAP increase was “put on hold.”⁴ Deputy Mayor Turnage’s statement on the record confirmed what Councilmember Christina Henderson told the rest of the Council in a “dear colleague” letter dated November 30, 2023: that the Administration “does not intend to implement the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022.”⁵

The Administration’s refusal to implement the Budget Support Act as drafted is not only unlawful, but it is devastating for our neighbors in need. More than 140,000 residents are relying on these increases, and many have made financial decisions in reliance on the law the Council passed and the CFO’s revenue estimates. Pulling the rug out from under them at the last minute is unlawful and unjustifiable.⁶ We join the statement that all 13 Councilmembers made on December 13 in asking you to reconsider this decision and to implement the law as written.

The Administration Should Fully Fund the Give SNAP a Raise Act of 2022

While the 2024 temporary funding increase for SNAP is critical, it does not go far enough. Instead, we urge you to fully fund the Give SNAP a Raise Act of 2022 (D.C. Act 24-733) in the FY 2025 budget.

³ Government of the District of Columbia, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, September 2023 Revenue Estimates, https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/release_content/attachments/Sep_2023_Estimate_letter_09292023_FINAL.pdf.

⁴ Roundtable on Health and Human Services Benefits Enrollment and the DC Access System, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og6SL6fHaso&t=13642s> beginning at 3:10:35.

⁵ See Christina Henderson, Councilmember At-Large, Chairperson Committee on Health, <https://janeeseward4.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Give-SNAP-a-Raise-Dear-Colleagues-Letter.pdf>.

⁶ *Id.*

associated with higher risks of being hospitalized and poorer general health and with having asthma, behavioral problems, depression, suicidal ideation, and worse oral health.¹⁴


Making sure our neighbors have nutritious food is not only a moral imperative, it is also fiscally wise. The devastating consequences of malnutrition will increase costs to the government in terms of health care and public safety.¹⁵ Funding this bill provides urgent assistance to hungry people and, in doing so, such funding addresses many of the downstream consequences we are seeing across the District.

A supposed lack of resources to fund a SNAP increase is not an excuse for inaction. There are options to raise revenue without harming vulnerable families that would offset any projected or unexpected costs to the District. Ensuring that people living in poverty can put food on their tables for their families and children is an urgent priority, and we urge you to fund this important increased benefit.

Conclusion

Legal Aid DC urges you to fund the FY 2024 increase in SNAP benefits and ultimately fund the Give SNAP a Raise Act of 2022. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. If you want to discuss these issues further, please contact me at (202) 661-5957 or vswaruup@legalaiddc.org.

Sincerely,


Vikram Swaruup
Executive Director
Legal Aid DC

CC:

Wayne Turnage, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
Laura Zeilinger, Director of the DC Department of Human Services
Brian Schwalb, Attorney General
Phil Mendelson, Chairman of the DC Council

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ See Center for Disease Control and Prevention, State-Level and County-Level Estimates of Health Care Costs Associated with Food Insecurity, https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2019/18_0549.htm - [:~:text=Among approximately 28,266,000 food-insecure,expenditures associated with food insecurity](https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2019/18_0549.htm#:~:text=Among%20approximately%2028,266,000%20food-insecure,expenditures%20associated%20with%20food%20insecurity;); Jonathan Randel Caughron, An Examination of Food Insecurity and Its Impact on Violent Crime in American Communities, <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3571&>.