



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

250 East Broad Street, Suite 220
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 481-3511
www.ohioaging.org

TESTIMONY TO OHIO HOUSE COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 178

Kelsey Bergfeld, Chief Policy Officer, bergfeld@ohioaging.org
Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging
May 13, 2025

Chair Click, Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Brewer, and members of the House Community Revitalization Committee, I am Kelsey Bergfeld, Chief Policy Officer for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging (o4a). I'm here to express our support for House Bill 178, which would require the state to supplement Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for older Ohioans so that they receive at least \$50 per month.

We know that food is medicine and a nutritious diet plays a significant role in promoting health, healing and well-being. Ohio's 12 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) coordinate home-delivered meal programs and serve as congregate meal sites to ensure the older adults we serve have access to nutritious meals as our resources allow. We also help connect people to food assistance through their local Aging and Disability Resource networks. Unfortunately, we are unable to connect with every older adult in need of nutritional support.

SNAP continues to be a vital support for older adults across the state. Research shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity, reduces depression, increases prescription adherence, and leads to lower health care costs. Access to SNAP has even been better nutritional outcomes and directly associated with a reduced likelihood of nursing home and hospital admissions.

Sadly, older adults' participation in SNAP is remarkably low. Approximately three out of five older adults who qualify to receive SNAP are missing out on the benefits. Several factors contribute to the low participation rate – older adults can face barriers related to mobility, technology, stigma and are discouraged by benefit inadequacy and widespread myths about how the program works and who can qualify.

We saw the profound impact of strengthening SNAP benefits when the federal government temporarily expanded SNAP benefits during the pandemic to address rising food insecurity and provide economic stimulus during some of the most uncertain and unprecedented times in

American history. Before the pandemic, the minimum SNAP benefits older adults received was \$23 per month. With the emergency benefits, their monthly amount increased to \$281 per month.

For SNAP households headed by older adults, this expansion was life-changing. Individuals reported improved mental, physical and emotional health due to increased resources to buy food. At a time when 1 in 2 older adults nationally are malnourished or at risk of becoming malnourished, the SNAP Emergency Benefits made a difference.

When the emergency benefits expired in February of 2023 approximately 70,000 older Ohioan households returned to the minimum benefit of \$23 per month. With the rising cost of food, housing and health care, many older adults must further stretch fixed incomes and make difficult choices to take care of their basic needs.

With a SNAP supplemental benefit as proposed in HB 178, Ohio lawmakers have an opportunity to make a legitimate impact on the health and well-being of older Ohioans. For Ohio to be the best state nation in which to age, we need sound public policy and innovative solutions for all of us to thrive as we age. We are all aging, and this is important to us all.

We urge you to support HB 178 as a proactive and important step towards reducing food insecurity and hunger among older Ohioans.