Supplemental Benefit Allotment for SNAP Recipients
Chairman Click
Paige Fortner, Program Manager of SSAG - Mahoning Valley
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House Bill 178

Chairman Click, Vice Chairwoman Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer and members of the House Community Revitalization Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today as a proponent of House Bill 178. My name is Paige Fortner and I am the Program Manager for the Senior Support Action Group (SSAG), a program that provides services to low-income, homebound seniors across the Mahoning Valley—including Mahoning, Trumbull, and Columbiana Counties. At SSAG, we meet our neighbors where they are, offering nourishment through supplemental food boxes, vital transportation to medical appointments and grocery stores, and the steady presence of companionship to ease the ache of isolation.

One of our primary services is providing supplemental food boxes to homebound seniors each month. Over the last two years, we have seen a steady and heartbreaking rise in the number of older adults reaching out in hunger. From April of 2023 to April of 2025, our program has seen a 28% increase in food box recipients. These are our neighbors, our elders, the quiet backbone of this region. Many now live alone, stretched thin on fixed incomes, making impossible choices—between medication and groceries, between paying the electric bill and buying a loaf of bread. I've spoken with several of our clients personally, who have told me that they ration their meals to stretch canned goods over a months' time, and others who give up meals entirely to ensure their pets don't go without. The reality is, by the time food box day arrives, their cupboards are bare, and that box becomes not just a lifeline, but quite literally their only source of nourishment.

We are deeply encouraged by the legislation introduced by Representatives Troy and Williams, proposing a state-funded supplement to increase the minimum monthly SNAP benefit for seniors to $50. We urge you to support this critical measure, not only because it feeds our older adults, but because it restores dignity.

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SNAP does more than provide nutrition, it empowers seniors with the ability to choose foods that suit their health needs and cultural traditions. This is especially vital for individuals managing chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, or food allergies. In Mahoning County, 25% of adults over 65 have been diagnosed with diabetes, and 65% have been diagnosed with high blood pressure. These chronic conditions require careful dietary management such as low-sodium foods, fresh produce, and whole grains—which are often unaffordable or unavailable without adequate assistance. Serving our homebound seniors, we do our best through food delivery, but we simply cannot meet every unique dietary or medical need. SNAP gives seniors the autonomy to buy what's right for their bodies, not just what happens to be on our shelves.

This change would also boost our local economy. The Mahoning Valley has always been powered by its people—and our local economy depends on neighbors supporting neighbors. When seniors are equipped with SNAP dollars, they're not only feeding themselves, they're feeding the community. These funds are spent at corner markets, neighborhood grocery stores, and local farmers' stands, helping to sustain small businesses and regional agriculture. In a region working hard to rebuild and reimagine its economic future, every dollar kept local matters. Strengthening SNAP for seniors is a smart investment in the economic resilience of our valley.

We hope you'll consider the weight of this moment. No one should age into hunger in this country—especially not the people who helped build it. I thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today, I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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