

Testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 2317 to Streamline Access to SNAP for older Rhode Islanders 60 years of age and older

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Thank you, Senators Sosnowski, Miller, Felag, Lawson Coyne and DiPalma for introducing this important bill. Senior Agenda Coalition of Rhode Island supports this act which would require the RI Department of Human Services to streamline the application and recertification process for SNAP beneficiaries aged 60 and over. This would improve seniors' access to this vital food support.

Why this Legislation is Needed: According to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, **40%** of Rhode Island's population of 60 years and older eligible for SNAP **do not participate** in the program.¹ Seniors report that they find the SNAP application onerous, requiring that senior SNAP recipients must recertify every two years to show that they are still eligible for SNAP. Recertification requires completing an application and an interview and submitting documentation to verify income sources and amounts. *DHS data show that 10% of elderly recipients fail to recertify each month and then are forced to reapply, creating more work for DHS staff.* **This legislation would address both of these problems.**

According to the U.S. Census, the number of Rhode Islanders aged 65 and older has grown 32,085 from 2010 to 2020, a 22% increase. With this growth has been **the increase in the number of seniors in need of food assistance:** The number of 65 years and older persons in poverty from 2010 to 2020 increased by 4.9%, from 15,664 to 16,425, while for the RI's total number in poverty decreased by 4.5%.² The poverty rate of 75 years and older adults increased from 10.5% to 10.9%, with women in this age group having the highest poverty rate of 12.7% in 2020.

How It Will Work: The legislation requires DHS to implement an option in the federal SNAP regulations known as the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP). It applies to SNAP recipients aged 60 and older or with disabilities who have no earned income. ESAP would:

- Create a shorter application for seniors applying for SNAP.
- Increase the period between recertifications from 2 years to 3 years.
- Waive the need for interviews at recertification.

For DHS, ESAP would reduce the administrative workload of the eligibility technicians by reducing the number of recertifications they need to process and the number of interviews they need to conduct each month. **There are no fiscal implications for this legislation**, making it a win for both clients and DHS.

The following states have either adopted ESAP or are considering it: FL, MD, MS, PA, WA, AL, AZ, CA, GA, SC, MA, VT, KY, OH, TX, NJ and the District of Colombia.

¹ USDA Food and Nutrition Service US Participation Map See: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usamap>

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 & 2010 tables B17001 Poverty Status in Past 12 Months by Sex & Age