

Maryland Hunger Solutions' Annual Food Stamp Challenge

# FOOD STAMP CHALLENGE

*COULD YOU EAT FOR JUST \$4.30 A DAY?*



**Maryland Hunger Solutions**

*Ending hunger and promoting well-being*

## ABOUT MARYLAND HUNGER SOLUTIONS

Maryland Hunger Solutions (MDHS) aims to end hunger and improve nutrition in the state of Maryland. MDHS focuses on using federal nutrition supports (school meals, summer and afterschool nutrition programs, Food Stamps and other nutrition programs) to reduce hunger and its adverse effects on health, learning, productivity and well-being; to improve nutrition; and to strengthen community institutions. Its goal is to increase access to these programs and other nutritious food sources in low-income areas across Maryland through public education, training and technical assistance, direct outreach and advocacy to improve program participation and implementation. Established in 2007, MDHS is a separately staffed and funded initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. Maryland Hunger Solutions is a core member of the Partnership to End Childhood Hunger, a public-private coalition led by the Governor's Office for Children to raise awareness about childhood hunger in the state and increase participation in nutrition programs that combat hunger.

Maryland Hunger Solutions works closely with state and local organizations to improve participation in the Food Supplement Program ("Food Stamps") and to expand access to the program. In summer 2010, Maryland Hunger Solutions sponsored three Baltimore City farmers' markets to accept Food Stamp benefits using the EBT card, becoming the first farmers' markets in Baltimore City to accept EBT benefits. In 2011, Maryland Hunger Solutions expanded its scope to include a total of seven farmers markets, further increasing access to healthy food for Food Stamp recipients in the community. The project was made possible through generous funding from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, the Abell Foundation, and Wholesome Wave Foundation.

Maryland Hunger Solutions gratefully acknowledges the following funders for their support of our work.

The Abell Foundation	Kaiser Permanente
Baltimore Community Foundation	MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
The Annie E. Casey Foundation	The Moriah Fund
Community Foundation for the National Capital Region	The Morningstar Foundation
Consumer Health Foundation	Share Our Strength
HEAL Convergence Partnership	U.S. Department of Agriculture
David and Barbara B. Hirschhorn Foundation	The Wal-Mart Foundation
	Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation

# TAKING THE FOOD STAMP CHALLENGE

## **STRUGGLING TO AFFORD FOOD IN MARYLAND**

One in six Maryland households reported difficulty affording enough food in 2009-2010, underscoring the economic challenges that continue to face many Marylanders.<sup>1</sup> The Food Supplement Program (formerly known as Food Stamps) is a critical resource for struggling households, helping low-income people purchase food for themselves and their families. In September 2011, over 700,000 Maryland residents relied on Food Supplement Program benefits.<sup>2</sup> This number has more than doubled in five years.

## **MARYLAND HUNGER SOLUTIONS ISSUES THE FOOD STAMP CHALLENGE**

Maryland Hunger Solutions is committed to improving access to the federal nutrition programs and to healthy foods for Maryland residents.

To call attention to the nutritional needs of low-income people throughout the state, Maryland Hunger Solutions challenged Marylanders to live on the average weekly food stamp benefit—just \$30—for seven days.

The exercise opened participants' eyes to the struggles many Marylanders face trying to put enough food on the table while maintaining a healthy diet. It also made them stronger advocates for safety net programs, as they realized the value of each food dollar for their low-income neighbors, clients, and constituents.

## **FOOD STAMP CHALLENGE RULES**

1. Each person should spend no more than \$30 on food and beverages during the Challenge week.
2. All food purchased and eaten during the Challenge week, including fast food and dining out, must be included in the total spending.
3. During the Challenge, only eat food that you purchase for the project. Do not eat food that you already own (excluding spices and condiments).
4. Avoid accepting free food from friends, family, or at work.
5. Keep track of receipts on food spending and take note of your experiences throughout the week.

1. Food Research and Action Center. (March 2011). Food Hardship in America – 2010: Data for the Nation, States, 100 MSAs, and Every Congressional District. Retrieved from [http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/food\\_hardship\\_report\\_mar2011.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/food_hardship_report_mar2011.pdf)

2. Maryland Department of Human Resources. (2011). Statistical Report SFY 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/fia/pdf/statisticalreportsfy12.pdf>

# SEPTEMBER 2011: 175 PEOPLE JOIN MDHS AND TAKE THE CHALLENGE

Elected officials, advocates, students, leaders in faith communities, researchers, non-profit leaders, bloggers, and service providers—over 175 in total— took Maryland Hunger Solutions' second annual Food Stamp Challenge to raise awareness for hunger in Maryland.

Thank you to all who participated in the Challenge.



Tim Adams, Neighbor Works America • Qadira Ali • Christine Allen  
• Wendy Anderson • Judy Appiah • Alicia Aydlett • Rahn Barnes • Allison Bayley  
• Sharon Benson • Maryam Bhatti • Carolyn Bonner • Theresa Brion • Patricia Brooks  
• Louis Brown, Maryland Catholic Conference • Alexandra Brown, DHR/Central • Drew Brown  
• Kerrie Burch-DeLuca • Darlene Burr • Timmesha Butler • Chris Byrd, SHARE Food Network •  
Valerie Callahan • Edward Calloway • **Delegate Al Carr** • Harold Carter 3rd • Debi Celink • Douglas  
Charles • Meredith Clarke • Stephen Clement • Derek Coelho • Linda Colander • LaTasha Coleman •  
Jessica Cordero • Marion Craig • Jim Curley • Kate Daney • **Cathy Demeroto, Maryland Hunger Solutions**  
• Rosemary Dipietro • Carl Donaldson • Mitra Ebrahimi • David Edge • Betsy Edwards, Food Research and  
Action Center • Belinda Ellerbe • Rhonda Ellis • Pamala Emplit • Sandra Ferguson, SCSEP/Catholic Charities •  
Rebecca Fishack • JoAnn Fisher • Marie-Laure Flamer • Laura Flamm, Maryland Hunger Solutions • Evelyn Fletcher  
• Bettye Frantz • Christine Garcia • Roz George, AARP • Terrina Gogue • Jordan Graham • Keith Green •  
**Hank Greenberg, AARP State Director for Maryland** • Janae Griffin • Beckie Gurley • Pamela Hagan • Joanna Han,  
University of Maryland • Beth Harber • Dorothy Hastings • Albert Hastings • Dorene Holloman • Theresa Holloway • Jenni-  
fer Holz • Eunjin Hong • Marisa Hrbal • Leanna Hutzell • **Rosemary King Johnston, Governor's Office for Children** •  
David Johnston • Cheerita Jones • Gwendolyn Jones • Ali Kagawa Koide • Isha Kamara • Mary Kennely • **Mike Lachance,**  
**Legislative Liaison for the Maryland State Department of Aging** • Shalesha Lake • Sarah Lange • Joanne Laporte •  
Tamika LaShawn • Shari Lawler • Stephanie Layne • Barbara Levin • Michelle Levy, Crossroads Farmers' Market • Aaron  
Litz, UMDCP • Lindsey Lucas • Rebecca MacEwen • **Rosemary Malone, Department of Human Resources** •  
**Bill McCarthy, Executive Director of Catholic Charities in Baltimore** • Lavisha McClarin • Colli McKiernan • Kara  
Mealer • Jillien Meier, Maryland Hunger Solutions • Celicia Meisner, Junior League of Baltimore • Miguel Melendez • Shan-  
non Michelinie • Jerry Miller • William Mize, Univ. of Maryland College Park School of Public Health • Anne Monius •  
Shanice Morris • William Murtaugh • Peter Nicewicz • Angela Niyi • Kim Norris, Ecoeval Evaluation Services • Tyra  
Pierce • **Senator Jamie Raskin** • Jessie Reed • Sonia Reyes • Jacqueline Richardson • Michelle Riley, University of  
Maryland Extension • Catherine Rizos, Maryland Hunger Solutions • Vernon Roberts • **Delegate Shane Robinson**  
• Melvin Robinson • Elizabeth Rosenberg, University of Maryland • Sondra Rubin • Kara Savory • Danielle Schor  
• Angela Shepherd • Anne Sheridan, Share Our Strength • Karen Silver • Lily Starr • Diana Stephenson •  
Amy Stratton • Michael Summers • Blain Tesfaye, UMD, CP • Yvette Thomas • Sue Thompson •  
Stephanie Trop • Dale Tyndle • Ernestine Upshur • **Delegate Mary Washington** •  
Aisha Wellington, UMD • Shryl Whigham • Kirk Wilborne • Michael Wilcher • Patsy Williams  
Steward • Gene Williams, AARP • Timothy Williamson • Beth Wiseman, BCASCO •  
Valerie Woodward • Earl Woodward • Lester Wright •  
Teresa Zaffiro • Steve Zeender

**SEE VIDEOS, DIARIES, EVENTS AND MORE AT:**

[HTTP://WWW.MDHUNGERSOLUTIONS.ORG/FOODSTAMP\\_CHALLENGE.SHTM](http://www.mdhungersolutions.org/foodstamp_challenge.shtm)

# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## WHY DID YOU JOIN THE FOOD STAMP CHALLENGE?

“For me, the Challenge is an **exercise in empathy**. It helps us better understand what many of our vulnerable neighbors experience on a daily basis – sometimes for weeks or months or even longer. And it further heightens my commitment to ending hunger and improving well-being in our state.”

*-Cathy Demeroto, Director, Maryland Hunger Solutions*



[HTTP://UMDFOODSTAMPCHALLENGE.EDUBLOGS.ORG/](http://UMDFOODSTAMPCHALLENGE.EDUBLOGS.ORG/)

More than 40 University of Maryland public health students took the Challenge and blogged about their experiences. For many, this was a first glimpse into the difficulties that low-income Marylanders face every day. During the Challenge, Maryland Hunger Solutions spoke with the class about health and hunger in Maryland. One student said:

“As a Public Health major, I have been learning about living under the poverty line, food rationing, socio-economic disparities, and **read statistics** regarding incomes and food spending. However, **it was not until this exercise until this reality sunk in and clicked.**”

“We’re considered one of the wealthiest states in the country...We have a **responsibility to our community** that we help the least of us – our neighbors - to ensure that they have those basic necessities.”

*-Bill McCarthy, Executive Director, Catholic Charities in Maryland*



“**Seniors quite often are living on fixed incomes** and as the price of food has been increasing for a number of factors, we have heard from food pantries that many seniors are visiting them for the first time.”

*-Mike Lachance, Legislative Liaison, Maryland Dept of Aging*

# BUDGETS STRETCHED BEYOND CAPACITY

## HUNGER IN THE FREE STATE

For one in six households in Maryland, affording food is a struggle.<sup>1</sup> Of those, 1/3 are likely to go hungry or skip meals.<sup>2</sup>

## VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Hunger does not affect every household equally. Children are at significantly higher risk of hunger, especially in households headed by single females. More than one in five Maryland households with children (20.8%) experienced food hardship in 2010<sup>3</sup> and nationwide a staggering 35.1% of all single female-headed households with children were food insecure in the 2008-2010 period.<sup>2</sup>

African Americans and Latinos also face a significantly higher burden of food insecurity, with nationwide rates at 25.1% and 26.2%, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Seniors are vulnerable to hunger due to their fixed incomes while residents of rural areas (food insecurity rates of 14.7%) and major cities (food insecurity rate of 17.0%) are also burdened with high rates of food insecurity.<sup>2</sup>

## THE ROLE OF FOOD STAMPS

The Food Supplement Program (FSP)—commonly referred to as “Food Stamps” and known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—is the largest federally funded anti-hunger program. To qualify, households have to earn less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level before taxes. In 2012, this means a family of four has to earn less than \$3,726 each month to qualify.<sup>4</sup>

In September 2011, over 700,000 Maryland residents relied on Food Supplement Program benefits to fill their grocery carts.<sup>5</sup> That is more than the populations of Garret, Allegany, Washington, Frederick, and Carroll Counties combined.<sup>6</sup>

Even with huge increases in FSP participation, only 70% of eligible households are receiving FSP benefits.<sup>7</sup> Seniors, Latinos, and rural populations are especially vulnerable to hunger, as they often do not apply for Food Stamp benefits for which they are eligible.

1. FRAC. (March 2011). Food Hardship in America – 2010: Data for the Nation, States, 100 MSAs, and Every Congressional District. Retrieved from [http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/food\\_hardship\\_report\\_mar2011.pdf](http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/food_hardship_report_mar2011.pdf)

2. Coleman-Jensen, A., Nord, M., Andrews, M., Carlson, S. (2011). Household food security in the United States in 2010. ERR-125. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

3. FRAC. (August 2011). Food Hardship in America 2010: Households with and without children. Retrieved from [http://frac.org/pdf/aug2011\\_food\\_hardship\\_report\\_children.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/aug2011_food_hardship_report_children.pdf)

# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH FOOD SHOPPING? WAS \$30 ENOUGH?

"Normally when I'm in the produce section I just buy what I want to eat, and I don't pay much attention to the cost, but that is **not an option on this budget.**"

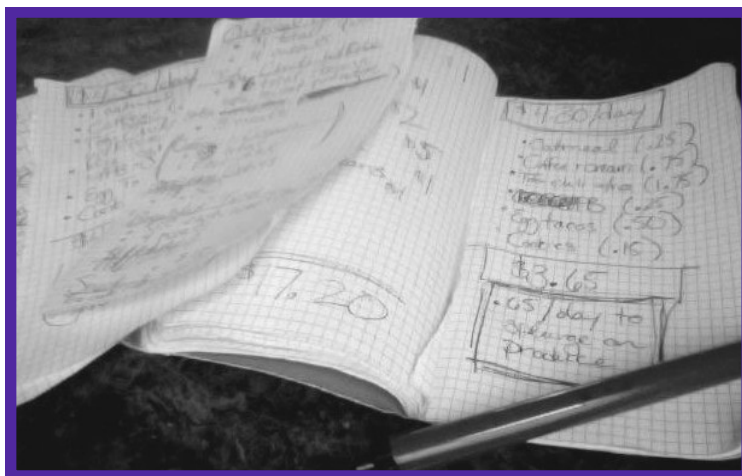
*-Delegate Shane Robinson, District 39, Montgomery County*

"I spent \$19.45 and an hour in Wal-Mart last evening. The experience was as humbling to me this year as last. **Milk and carrots cost more this year. The food stamp supplement has not increased.** More of our neighbors are shopping this way this year."

*-Bill McCarthy, Executive Director, Catholic Charities in Baltimore*

"I'm thinking about my weekly food purchases. I'm thinking about last night's apple pie alone. I'm wondering **how far \$30 could possibly go when trying to eat healthfully**, eat fresh, and eat local."

*-Michele Levy, Eat Fresh MD/  
Crossroads Farmers Market*



"Persons from communities without supermarkets either have take several buses or worse pay for a taxi to shop at a supermarket or more likely shop at a neighborhood corner store with few healthy, affordable grocery options. **Owning a reliable car is a luxury** and great convenience many don't enjoy."

*-Chris Byrd, SHARE Food Network*

4. Maryland DHR. (2011). <http://dhr.maryland.gov/fiaprograms/fstamp/iag.pdf>

5. Maryland DHR. (2011). Statistical Report SFY 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/fia/pdf/statisticalreportsfy12.pdf>

6. U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). Retrieved from: <http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/html/pop.html>

7. USDA. (2011). Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Reaching2009.pdf>

# HEALTH ON A BUDGET

## NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF HUNGER

Food insecurity has negative impacts across a person's lifetime, including psychosocial issues; obesity; and poor growth, development, learning, attention, and health.<sup>1-4</sup>

## ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Food insecure and low-income people are especially vulnerable to health complications like obesity due to additional risk factors associated with poverty, including:

- Limited resources
- Lack of access to healthy, affordable foods
- Fewer opportunities for physical activity
- Cycles of food deprivation and overeating
- High levels of stress
- Greater exposure to marketing of obesity-promoting products
- Limited access to health care

## THE FEDERAL FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS HELP

Federal food assistance programs like Food Stamps, school meals, after-school and summer food, and WIC are proven ways to combat obesity, improve academic achievement, increase attendance, and bolster local economies. Every \$5 in Food Stamps generates \$9 in local economic activity.<sup>5</sup>

## STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH FOOD INSECURITY

1. Plan a week's worth of meals and make a grocery list.
2. Find ways to use the same ingredients in different meals.
3. Compare unit prices to get the best deal. Buy shelf-stable foods like rice, dried beans, and canned foods in bulk when they are on sale.
4. Make meals ahead of time. Cook several batches of a meal like soup or casserole and freeze individual or family size portions to use on busy days.

1. Alamilo, K., Olson, C. M., Frongillo, E. A., Briefel, R. R., (2001). Food insufficiency, family income, and health in US preschool and school-aged children. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(5), 781-786.

2. Dinour, L. M., Bergen, D., Ming-Chin, Y. (2007). The food insecurity-obesity paradox: A review of the literature and the role Food Stamps may play. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 107, 1952-1961.

3. Franklin, B., Jones, A., Love, D., Puckett, S., Macklin, J., White-Means, S. (2011). Exploring mediators of food insecurity and obesity: A review of recent literature. *Journal of Community Health*, e-publication ahead of print.

4. Olson, C. M. (1999). Nutrition and health outcomes associated with food insecurity and hunger. *Journal of Nutrition* 129(S), 521-524.

5. Hanson, Kenneth. (2010). The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR103/ERR103.pdf>

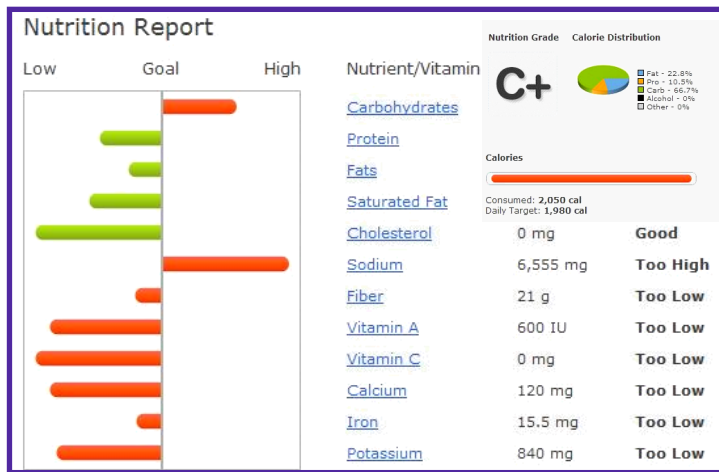


# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## DID YOU EAT WELL ON THE FOOD STAMP CHALLENGE? HOW DID YOU FEEL?

(Day 5) "I feel pretty icky at this point. I am certainly eating enough. I purchased healthy foods, but **I can't dream of choking down another banana**, more beans or another cup of split pea soup. I am used to a variety of healthy foods."

-Jen Holz, AARP Maryland



"One of my goals for this challenge is to not only eat under \$4.30 a day, but to do so and try to maintain a healthy lifestyle. I made an account on [www.caloriecount.com](http://www.caloriecount.com), put in my basic information concerning age, weight, height, and activity level, and it gave me recommended nutritional levels in order to maintain a healthy diet. Well, I put in my food intake for the day and these were the results...

The greatest area of concern is my **sodium levels!** At **273% the daily value**, I could probably salt a cake with my sweat. (yes, people put salt on their cakes!) All of my **vitamins were extremely low**, as well as my fiber, which is probably due to the **lack of fruits and vegetables.**"

-Wayne, UMD College Park

"While it is probably rare for someone to choose to ride a bike to work & also train for a marathon on a food-stamp budget, I do suspect that my high calorie needs are not all that different from someone who has to ride their bike to a physically demanding job. When faced with simply needing to get enough calories to physically get done what needs to get done, the food calculations start to be **influenced less by healthy/balanced food choices and more by getting as cheap as calories as possible.**"

-Tim Adams, NeighborWorks America

# FAR-REACHING EFFECTS OF HUNGER

## HOW DID THE FOOD STAMP CHALLENGE IMPACT YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE?

"This challenge brought back memories of my childhood [...] the **anxiety and stress** my parents had to deal with in order to provide for a family living on a very limited budget. This has been a very humbling experience."

-Kirk Wilborne



"It was a week in which I thought long and hard about the **luxury I have of being able to eat out with friends occasionally** or even pick up something "special." I also thought of the difficulties families must have in eating in a healthy manner, with busy work and school schedules."

-Theresa Brion



# MEDIA COVERAGE



Rosemary King Johnston, Executive Director of the Governor's Office for Children speaks with camera crews about her strategy for making her \$30 food budget stretch.

## **Food Stamp 'Challenge' Lays Bare Hard Times in US (Fabienne Faur, Economic Times, SGGP, September 30, 2011)**

"A record 45 million Americans are now living on food stamps [...] For everyone else, there's the Food Stamp Challenge, thrown down by anti-hunger activists in the industrial port city of Baltimore to lay bare the reality of living on the poverty line. Participants each get \$30—the average Food Stamp benefit in the East Coast state—to buy groceries for a week, after which they are invited to blog about their experience."

## **Eating on \$30 A Week: A Non-Profit Leader's Dose of Reality (David Snyder, Elkridge Patch, Catonsville Patch, September 23, 2011)**

"During any normal week, Barbara Levin wouldn't think twice about joining her co-workers to purchase lunch. Or, if she were cooking at home and burned dinner, she would simply run to the store for more. Not this week. Beginning on Monday, Levin, the client services director at Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland, joined [...] the Food Stamp Challenge, pledging to use just \$30—the average weekly Maryland Food Stamp benefit—to pay for her food costs this week."

# PROTECT LOW-INCOME MARYLANDERS

"Now I'm wondering how people with special dietary needs could possibly stay within the \$30 a week average food stamp allotment. Here at Meals on Wheels, the majority of my clients have significant **health issues**. And **how much are their conditions worsened** when they can't afford the right foods to eat?"

*-Barbara Levin, Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland*

"I chose to live on \$4.30 a day for one week. **Many children and their parents who have no choice** do this every day, 365 days a year!"

*-Derek Coehlo, Catholic Charities*

"Probably the most memorable experience for us was the seriousness that the two 13 year-olds embraced this effort. They admit that they worked to contain their penchant for 'snacking' their way through the day and to really **think about other children who cannot snack or even have full meals** on many days."

*-Gene Gary Williams, AARP*

"I would have to say that overall, the past week has been one of the memorable and transformative experiences of my life. Going into the food stamp challenge I honestly felt that it would not have that much of an effect on me. I mean, how hard is it to live off \$30 worth of food for six days? I thought six days would be difficult, but completely manageable. I totally **underestimated the struggles** that people who live off of Food Stamps have to face daily."

*-Evelyn, UMD College Park*



# KEEP THE SAFETY NET STRONG

“What strikes me the most is the importance of ensuring food security to households with children because of the simple notion that **children who are not eating and eating well cannot focus or do well in school**. If from an early age they develop poor learning and reading skills because of reasons linked to malnourishment, how can they get an education and rise up out of poverty?”

*-Marie Laure, UMD College Park*

“As the economy worsens and more and more Maryland families are participating in the Food Stamp program, I think it’s really important for all of us to realize that this is a supplement and it gives them **the extra they need to feed their children.**”

*-Rosemary King Johnston,  
Executive Director, Governor’s  
Office for Children*

“The recession has been hard on almost everybody and people feel the pinch in different ways. But it’s one thing if you can’t afford to buy the new car or suit that you wanted; it’s another thing if you don’t know where the money is coming from to buy meals for your family for the weekend. [...]

People who are hungry are dealing with the bottom-level basic needs. We’re facing some **brutal budget choices in Maryland** as are other states across the country. This experiment that you guys do [with the Food Stamp Challenge] reminds us that **keeping people well-nourished should be at the very center** of our thoughts.”

*-Senator Jamie Raskin, District 20, Montgomery County*

