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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2022

Wolf Administration, Anti-Hunger Advocates Call for Support for Proposed Investments in Food Security of Pennsylvania's Seniors, People with Disabilities

Harrisburg, PA – Leadership from the departments of Aging, Agriculture, and Human Services today joined Feeding Pennsylvania, Hunger Free PA, Just Harvest, and other anti-hunger advocates to highlight proposed investments in the minimum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit for seniors and people with disabilities in Governor Tom Wolf's 2022-23 proposed budget.

Governor Wolf is seeking to invest \$14.3 million in state funds in order to increase the minimum monthly benefit from \$20 each month to \$35 – an increase that will help approximately 141,000 Pennsylvanians who currently receive the minimum benefit have a little more room in their budget to keep food on the table.

“As the nation continues to navigate the impacts of the ongoing pandemic that disproportionately impacted seniors and people with disabilities, access to essential needs like food is more important than ever to help keep vulnerable populations healthy and mitigate co-occurring health risks,” said Human Services Acting Secretary Meg Snead. “This investment is a recognition of the interconnection of our daily basic needs, the economic limitations vulnerable people face to meet these needs, and overall health and wellbeing. By helping these Pennsylvanians keep food on the table, we are supporting local food retailers and producers, easing demand on charitable food systems, and, most importantly, helping people achieve a better quality of life that they deserve.”

“It's no secret that good nutrition and having access to healthy foods are crucial for everyone, particularly older adults. With many seniors on a fixed income and the cost of everything increasing, including food, the extra support in SNAP proposed by Governor Wolf will help many Pennsylvanians during these challenging times,” said Secretary of Aging Robert Torres. “I encourage older adults who are struggling with their nutritional needs to please contact your local area agency on aging or the Department of Aging and allow us to assess how we can help meet your nutritional needs or address other issues that may be impacting your quality of life.”

SNAP is our country's most important and most impactful anti-hunger program. SNAP helps more than 1.8 million Pennsylvanians by providing money each month to spend on groceries, helping households have resources to purchase enough food to avoid going hungry. This investment in public health and wellbeing also supports our local economies and food retailers, producers, and small businesses around Pennsylvania. SNAP also complements the work of our charitable food network by offsetting how often a person may need to use assistance from a

food bank or pantry. For every meal provided by a Feeding Pennsylvania food bank, SNAP provides nine.

“In a state as agriculturally rich as Pennsylvania, no one should go hungry. That’s why at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA), we are committed to operating programs like the Farmers Market Nutrition Program and the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System that are helping to connect our food-insecure neighbors with fresh, healthy foods produced right here in the commonwealth,” said Caryn Long Earl, PDA's Director of Bureau of Food Assistance. “However, these foods, along with the state and federal food and funds we provide to Pennsylvania’s charitable feeding system, are only part of the solution. In order for Pennsylvania’s seniors and people with disabilities to have access to well-rounded diets, it is critical that we increase the SNAP benefit levels for these individuals.”

“While our food banks strive to provide nutritious food for all Pennsylvanians facing hunger, our work is only a fraction of what the federal nutrition programs can accomplish. For every meal our food banks provide, SNAP provides nine,” said Jane Clements, CEO of Feeding Pennsylvania. “We are grateful to the Wolf Administration for proposing funding that will support some of the most vulnerable Pennsylvanians in need of food assistance.”

SNAP helps nearly 1 million total seniors and people with disabilities purchase fresh, healthy foods, complementing the work of our charitable food network and investing in local grocery stores, small businesses, and food producers while helping vulnerable Pennsylvanians keep food on the table. While SNAP is a federal program and is funded primarily through the federal budget, states administer eligibility and issuance of benefits.

"I thank God for whatever I can get and \$20 is a start, but try to spend \$20 dollars these days with the prices so high. Milk is \$4, bread \$3, American cheese is \$6.99, and a pound of bologna is \$5.99. That is as far as I can make it go for a month," said Janet, a 70-year-old SNAP recipient from Pittsburgh whose story was shared by Just Harvest. “Senior citizens deserve a good meal, just like the rest of the population. Please raise the minimum SNAP allotment and help seniors like me afford more healthy food. \$20 dollars is nowhere near enough to really help with today's prices.”

Inadequate food and chronic nutrient deficiencies have profound effects on a person’s life and health, including increased risks for chronic diseases, higher chances of hospitalization, poorer overall health, and increased health care costs. According to the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#), the number of seniors who experience food insecurity more than doubled from 2001-2015, but participation in SNAP has demonstrated reductions in the rate of hospital or nursing home stays.

In addition to SNAP helping keep food on the table and reducing rates of poor health that can come from inadequate access to food, SNAP helps local economies. In May 2019, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published [a study](#) on the influence of SNAP redemptions on the economy and county-level employment in the time leading up to, during, and after the Great Recession. This study found that SNAP redemptions could have a greater economic stimulus impact than many other forms of government spending per dollar spent, because they are paid directly to lower income individuals, helping them meet their most

essential, fundamental needs and investing in retailers and food producers more broadly. While SNAP is intended to be a supplemental program, the pandemic, historic unemployment, and continued economic instability have strained resources over the last two years, particularly for our lowest income Pennsylvanians. This investment will help seniors and people with disabilities continue to meet this most basic need that is essential to our quality of life and health.

"Lutheran congregational food pantries and community meals feed thousands of hungry families across our commonwealth every month. Even in areas where employment has risen, many are finding the need remains steady, with a growing percentage of seniors seeking charitable food," said Reverend Angela Hammer of St. Paul Lutheran Church Penryn. "Those whom they serve express their gratitude and report being worried about the fall -- when they will have to manage more expensive heating bills on top of higher gas and food prices."

Applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other public assistance programs can be submitted online at www.compass.state.pa.us or by phone at 1-866-550-4355. On-site [County Assistance Office](#) (CAO) services are available if clients cannot access online services or need assistance that cannot be accessed through the COMPASS website, the myCOMPASS PA mobile app, or by calling the Customer Service Centers at 215-560-7226 for Philadelphia clients or 1-877-395-8930 for clients in all other counties.

All Pennsylvanians experiencing financial hardships due to the pandemic, a lost job, or a change in income are strongly encouraged to apply and see if they qualify for assistance with food, health care, and other essential needs.

For more information about food assistance resources for people around Pennsylvania impacted by COVID-19 and economic insecurity, visit the Department of Agriculture's [food security guide](#).

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