

**Performance Oversight Hearing: Committee on Housing**  
**March 31, 2023**  
**Testimony of Blake Turpin**  
**Anti-Hunger Program Associate – SNAP and Special Populations, D.C. Hunger Solutions**

Good morning, Chairperson White and members of the Committee. Thank you for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify on the performance of the Department of Human Services.

My name is Blake Turpin, I am the Anti-Hunger Program Associate overseeing our SNAP and Special Populations work at D.C. Hunger Solutions. In my work, I provide direct assistance to community members to address their food needs, using the conversations I have every day to influence policy advocacy priorities and hold state agencies accountable to provide the best services possible. D.C. Hunger Solutions is also a part of the Fair Budget Coalition and fully supports their budget platform.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the District of Columbia. Currently, around 138,000 D.C. residents receive SNAP benefits through DHS. D.C. Hunger Solutions has worked closely with DHS for many years to improve SNAP policies and the client experience. We also serve as the primary outreach partner in the SNAP Outreach in the District. We help D.C. residents complete the application process, submit documentation, follow up on the status of their applications, and submit inquiries if any issues arise. In addition, we provide eligibility information, dispel myths about participation, reduce stigma, and connect residents to other crucial services offered by our partners. In Fiscal Year 2022, D.C. Hunger Solutions provided SNAP assistance to over 1,100 residents.

First, I would like to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has been especially challenging for DHS and would like to thank them for their dedication to this crucial work. We know they are facing staffing shortages, high caseloads, and now the fallout of the ending of SNAP Emergency Allotments and the public health emergency. Despite this, DHS has continued to work to improve SNAP access and quality by applying for various waivers and updating their policies and practices to make benefits more accessible for thousands of households. In particular, we would like to thank DHS ESA division for their ongoing collaboration in this work. We would also like to congratulate and applaud DHS for applying for and being awarded the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) waiver by USDA.

We understand that a variety of factors have led to a drop in revenue for the District which makes allocating funding difficult and this budget season even more difficult than usual. While we are happy to see that Mayor Bowser's proposed budget continues to invest in DHS programs that address food insecurity, we urge the Council to consider providing more funding to the agency to fully meet the demand for need in the District. Additionally, we are happy to see increased investments in anti-hunger programs like ProduceRx; however, we are disheartened to see an overall lack of investment in combatting hunger in the

District through legislation like the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022 and the No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act of 2021.

DHS continues to suffer from staffing shortages, technical issues, and ever-increasing demand that can only be addressed through additional funding for the agency to recruit and retain workers. As it stands, DHS has sometimes struggled to meet federal requirements for timelines for processing and delivering SNAP benefits, creating a cycle of concerned households who have not received communications calling DHS, further increasing their caseload and further delaying the processing of benefits. Additionally, people are experiencing very long wait times in person at ESA Service Centers and at Call Centers, resulting in frustration and concern among households receiving benefits. More staffing and more technical supports could alleviate this issue, but this will require adequate funding for the agency.

Due to high costs of living, rising inflation, and overall inadequacy of SNAP benefits for many households, we were disappointed to learn there is no funding for the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act, which would provide a local benefit to SNAP households to supplement their food budget. According to [a Food Research & Action Center report](#), “the greatest shortcoming of SNAP is that benefits for most households are not enough to get through the entire month without hunger or being forced to sacrifice nutrition quality.” While SNAP is a federal nutrition program, the District of Columbia is uniquely positioned to provide supplemental local benefits to its residents through Give SNAP a Raise.

These additional benefits are important now more than ever, as households are reeling from the end of Emergency Allotments, which provided over \$14 million in extra food benefits to over 90,000 District households every month. We receive multiple calls per week from households who are concerned about how low their benefit amounts are, wondering how they will possibly make ends meet while providing adequate food for their families. The ending of these allotments will also result in a further reduction in money circulating through the District’s economy, harming grocery stores and small businesses across the city.

We also urge full funding for the No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act of 2021. We ask that D.C. Council and D.C. Government find the revenue raisers to fund these programs and to prioritize funding investments in communities and anti-hunger and anti-poverty legislation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony on the performance of DHS and the Mayor’s proposed budget. Thank you for your time and attention, and we look forward to working with you to improve the health, nutrition, and wellbeing of everyone in the District of Columbia.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Blake Turpin".

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