


F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Leana Wen, Commissioner <i>Leana Wen</i>	Health Department MEMO	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201		
	Subject	Council Bill 15-0278R – Informational Hearing – Changes to Food Supplement Program Benefits Schedule		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

December 14, 2015

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Resolution 15-0278R – Informational Hearing – Changes to Food Supplement Program Benefits Schedule. The purpose of this bill is to call on representatives from the Health Department and the State Department of Human Resources appear before the City Council to discuss the change in the SNAP benefit distribution schedule, the short and long term pluses and minuses of this shift, and what resources are available to assist SNAP recipients who may experience difficulties in feeding their families while the benefit schedule is adjusted.

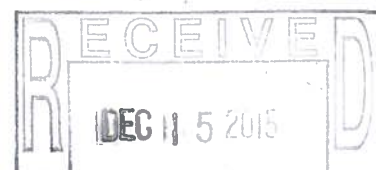
BCHD is a part of the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI), an intergovernmental collaboration to improve health outcomes by increasing access to healthy affordable food in Baltimore City's food deserts. One of BFPI's key proposals focused on developing a strategy to retain and attract supermarkets to food desert areas within the city. Extending the monthly Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) issuance period is a fundamental part of this strategy.

Extending the monthly SNAP issuance period has significant long-term implications for attracting and retaining supermarkets in the city. One of the biggest barriers to a grocer doing business in Baltimore's food deserts is that SNAP benefits are only disbursed over 10 days. This concentrated period of distribution resulted in equally concentrated period of sales for grocers. This schedule resulted in grocers having difficulty meeting customer demand and maintaining adequate stock during the busy times and shoppers facing large crowds and finding depleted supplies at the stores.

To help resolve this issue, BFPI issued a comprehensive best practice report on Extending SNAP Issuance Days in 2012. The report highlighted the growing trend of states extending their SNAP disbursement periods with the specific intent of smoothing retail cycles. At the time of the report, at least 11 states had increased their disbursement periods, and more than 10 states had benefit periods of 19 days or longer. As a result, BFPI worked closely the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) to extend the monthly SNAP issuance period.

In August 2015, Maryland DHR announced it planned to extend the number of days that SNAP is issued from 10 to 24 days over a five month period. The final change is scheduled to take place in January. This change will spread SNAP distribution throughout the month, allow

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grocers to sustain revenue and product availability, and enable customers to avoid large crowds and find more products in stock.

In addition to implementing the disbursement schedule, BFPI supported the State's efforts to inform the public about the upcoming changes. With more than 200,000 Baltimore residents receiving SNAP each month, BFPI and its agency members coordinated multiple efforts to help make the public aware of the change and ease the transition period for residents, including:

1. Distributing flyers and information to over 65 organizations, members of the Food Policy Advisory Committee and other BFPI affiliates including WIC, and asking them to share the information with their partners and residents. Flyers in Spanish were also provided for those communities that requested one;
2. Creating an additional flyer that instructed residents on how to acquire an emergency food box based on geography;
3. Coordinating with United Way to serve as a resource for residents by educating 2-1-1 hotline staff on the change;
4. Educating City agencies and community organizations on the change;
5. Meeting with Council Members to discuss the SNAP disbursement change;
6. Incorporating outreach into elements of the BCHD Baltimarket Virtual Supermarket program and grocery store-based community nutrition education.

Undoubtedly, this change will result in some period of adjustment for both stores and consumers. BCHD is confident that by providing steady outreach and support services, this change will ultimately result in an improved SNAP experience for businesses and the community.

The Health Department appreciates the opportunity to discuss this important issue. We will be present at the hearing to answer any questions the Council may have on this matter.

cc: Angela Gibson, Office of the Mayor
Andrew Nicklas, Director of Legislative Affairs, Department of Health