Maryland Department of Human Services Secures USDA Approval to Expedite Expansion of SNAP Program to Online Grocery Purchases, Curbside Pickup, and Delivery, Starting May 27, 2020

Posted by Garrett Pegg on May 20, 2020

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State Secures Another Victory on Behalf of Maryland's Vulnerable Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

BALTIMORE, MD — The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) announced today that it has secured approval from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service on its April 17th request to expedite online grocery purchases for food insecure Marylanders. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP as it's commonly known, helps low-income households buy the food they need. This accelerated timeline will provide SNAP households in Maryland with the opportunity to purchase groceries online from approved USDA retailers at no additional cost.

"Governor Larry Hogan has unfailingly championed every creative solution we've put forth in order to provide support to Marylanders during this unprecedented public health emergency," said Maryland Department of Human Services Secretary Lourdes R. Padilla. "The USDA Food and Nutrition Service also deserves considerable praise for their support and acute appreciation of our request."

The SNAP program plays a critical role in responding to vulnerable people who need food assistance, particularly during a crisis like the present COVID-19 pandemic. Allowing SNAP households to purchase food online will increase participation in the recommended public health practices and help mitigate the risks associated with exposure to the Coronavirus across Maryland. Approval of this request will also have a positive impact on Maryland households that might not have the ability to make SNAP purchases in person during this public health crisis, such as individuals with disabilities, those with chronic health conditions, and people who are required to self-quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19.

The Department of Human Services secured commitments from several major online retailers that are approved by the USDA, to ensure online SNAP becomes available to Marylanders as soon as possible.

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“We are grateful to ShopRite, Amazon, and Walmart, who made the commitment to waive delivery and servicing fees and enable SNAP households in Maryland to purchase eligible grocery items online,” said Netsanet Kibret, Executive Director of the Family Investment Administration for DHS. “We continue to pursue opportunities with other potential retailers that have the capacity to provide online purchasing and meet the USDA’s retailer requirements, so as to expand available resources.”

Online SNAP purchasing will be piloted by participating retailers in smaller geographic locations around the state on May 27, and will then be available to customers statewide on May 28. The process will function similar to the way a credit or bank card transaction occurs — SNAP recipients will be prompted to enter their EBT card details at checkout, along with the Personal Identification Number (PIN) associated with their card. To ensure the launch runs smoothly, the Department of Human Services provided test EBT cards to Walmart, Amazon, and ShopRite for end-to-end testing prior to rolling out the online SNAP pilot in Maryland.

This additional action taken by the Department is just the latest in a series of proactive measures it has made over the past several months to secure every resource available to support Maryland residents during this unprecedented public health emergency. On April 29, the Department of Human Services, in conjunction with the Maryland State Department of Education, announced it had secured approval from the USDA to operate a Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program to help Maryland households with children who had temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to pandemic-related school closures. As a result, approximately 427,000 vulnerable children in Maryland will benefit from the program for a combined value of over $49 million in estimated benefits. On April 23, the Department announced it had secured federal approval from the USDA to operate a Disaster Household Distribution Program and is distributing 1,000,000 lbs. of food to jurisdictions hit hardest by COVID-19. On April 17, the Department of Human Services submitted its request to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to expedite the capability for Maryland food retailers to accept online purchases made using SNAP benefits. On April 3, the Department announced it would provide over $66 million in additional SNAP benefits to more than 319,000 Maryland households in response to COVID-19. Additionally, on March 27, the Department of Human Services announced it had waived work requirements across all eligibility programs, extended the redetermination requirements for Marylanders receiving cash benefits for an additional six months, and secured approval from the USDA to extend certification periods and adjust reporting requirements for six months for Maryland’s SNAP benefit recipients.

The latest Departmental updates and COVID-related resources can be found on the Department of Human Services’ website at **http://dhs.maryland.gov/coronavirus**

*The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) is the state’s primary social service provider, annually reaching more than one million people. Through its 24 local departments of social services, the agency pursues opportunities to assist people in economic need, provide preventive services, and protect vulnerable children and adults in each of Maryland’s 23 counties and Baltimore City. Additional information may be found at **dhs.maryland.gov**.*

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