Maryland Department of Human Services Secures USDA Approval for Disaster Food Distribution During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Media Contact: Katherine Morris
katherine.morris@maryland.gov

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1,000,000 lbs. of Food Being Distributed to Areas Hardest Hit by COVID-19

BALTIMORE, MD — The Maryland Department of Human Services has taken additional action to support Marylanders, announcing today that its request to use USDA foods to operate a Disaster Household Distribution Program during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic was approved. The program is run through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and works to feed hungry families more efficiently and safely in times of crisis like the COVID-19 outbreak.

In partnership with the Maryland Food Bank and Capital Area Food Bank, the Maryland Department of Human Services is distributing 1,000,000 lbs. of food throughout its existing network of food banks, food pantries, and food programs, so as to reach those communities hit hardest by COVID-19.

“Like the rest of the nation, Maryland has seen an unprecedented surge in unemployment insurance claims following the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus,” said Maryland Department of Human Services Secretary, Lourdes R. Padilla. “Now more than ever, people across Maryland need food assistance, and the ongoing leadership from Governor Hogan and his administration and the continued support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture has proved critical to our Department’s efforts to serve vulnerable Marylanders during this especially difficult time.”

Jurisdictions receiving the assistance include, but are not limited to, those areas where there were 2,000 or more unemployment insurance claims in the month of March. Eligible jurisdictions may be added as the Department receives additional claims data from the Maryland Department of Labor. Eighteen of Maryland’s twenty-four jurisdictions, including Allegany, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Calvert, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George’s, Queen Anne’s, St. Mary’s, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, as well as Baltimore City, are currently eligible for the disaster household distribution emergency assistance.

Disaster food packages are prepared for a household of 1-2 members and include staples such as frozen meat, canned goods, dried and canned beans, rice, cereal, juice, shelf stable milk, fresh fruit, boxed pasta, and canned tomato sauce.

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For larger households, the Department of Human Services has approval to provide additional food packages based on household size. For example, a household of four could receive two disaster household distribution food packages.

This additional action taken by the Department is just the latest in a number of efforts it has made to secure every resource available to support Maryland residents during this unprecedented public health emergency. On April 17, the Department of Human Services submitted a request to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to expedite the capability for Maryland food retailers to accept online purchases made using SNAP benefits. The accelerated timeline will provide SNAP households in Maryland with the opportunity to purchase meals online from approved USDA retailers at no additional cost. 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 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 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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