

## Maryland's History of Low Food Stamp Participation

### *New Study Highlights Opportunity To Reduce Child Hunger*

#### Executive Summary

Many Maryland families who are eligible for food stamps are not getting them. A new analysis shows that the State's food stamp participation rate has lagged significantly behind the national average. The federal government pays for food stamps, which means that at little or no cost to the State, Maryland can reduce hunger through more effective outreach and easier enrollment processes.

#### Background

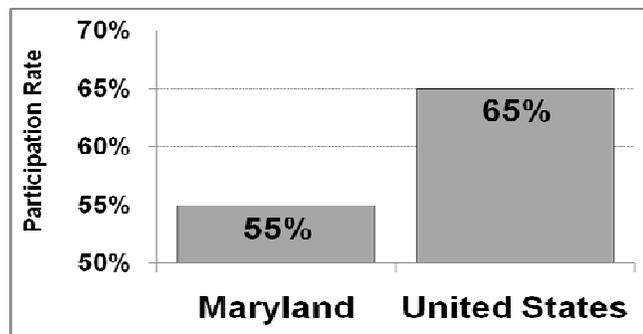
The Food Stamp Program is the largest anti-hunger program in Maryland, helping over 300,000 people purchase food each month.<sup>1</sup> Half of Maryland food stamp benefits go to households with children.<sup>2</sup> Low-income children are also eligible for free or reduced-price school breakfast and lunch and free summer meals. Despite these programs, 1 in 10 Maryland households is food-insecure or hungry.<sup>3</sup>

Congress recently reauthorized the Food Stamp Program through the Farm Bill, renaming it the "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." The reauthorization increased the minimum monthly benefit and improved eligibility rules to give more families access to food stamps.

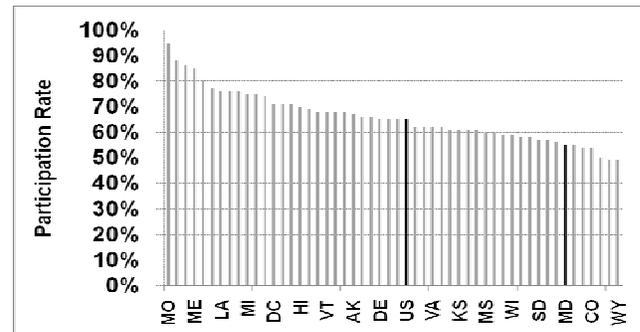
Food stamps prevent childhood hunger and provide temporary support to families as they move toward self-sufficiency. Half of all new participants leave the program within nine months.<sup>4</sup> The federal government pays 100 percent of food stamp program benefits, providing Maryland with about \$350 million annually.

#### Findings

Only 55 percent of eligible Marylanders received food stamp benefits in 2005, compared to a national participation rate of 65 percent, as shown below.



Maryland's 2005 participation rate ranks in the bottom quarter of states.<sup>5</sup>



The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that a 5 percentage point increase in Maryland's participation rate would provide food stamps to 25,000 additional Marylanders and bring \$12.6 million into Maryland's economy.<sup>6</sup> If Maryland reached the national participation rate--a 10 percentage point increase--50,000 additional people would benefit from food stamps.

#### Discussion and Recommendations

States across the nation are taking steps to increase food stamp participation. Vermont streamlined its application process, and the State of Washington is working to simplify program rules and inform more families of their eligibility.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Maryland can maximize participation through increased outreach, removal of obstacles to participation, and improved interagency collaboration.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 2007 Data. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fspmain.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2006* (2007).

<sup>3</sup> 2004-2006 average. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2006* (Nov. 2007).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *The Dynamics of Food Stamp Program Participation in the Early 1990s* (1998).

<sup>5</sup> The number of Marylanders receiving food stamps has steadily increased since this data was released in 2005. The number of participants nationwide has also risen, so Maryland's participation rate likely still lags behind. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2005* (Oct. 2007).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *The Business Case for Increasing Food Stamp Program Participation* (Oct. 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Children's Alliance, *End Childhood Hunger Washington* (2008).

