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**HIPHI Initiatives**

- Coalition for a Tobacco-Free Hawai'i
- Community-Based Research & Evaluation
- Community Health Worker Initiatives
- COVID-19 Response
- Environmental Health
- Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions
- Hawai'i Farm to School Hui
- Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition
- Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui
- Healthy Eating + Active Living
- Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging & Community Living
- Public Health Workforce Development

Date: March 19, 2024

To: Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair  
Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Human Services

Re: HR 31 Requesting the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization to Conduct a Study of Ways to Increase Access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits

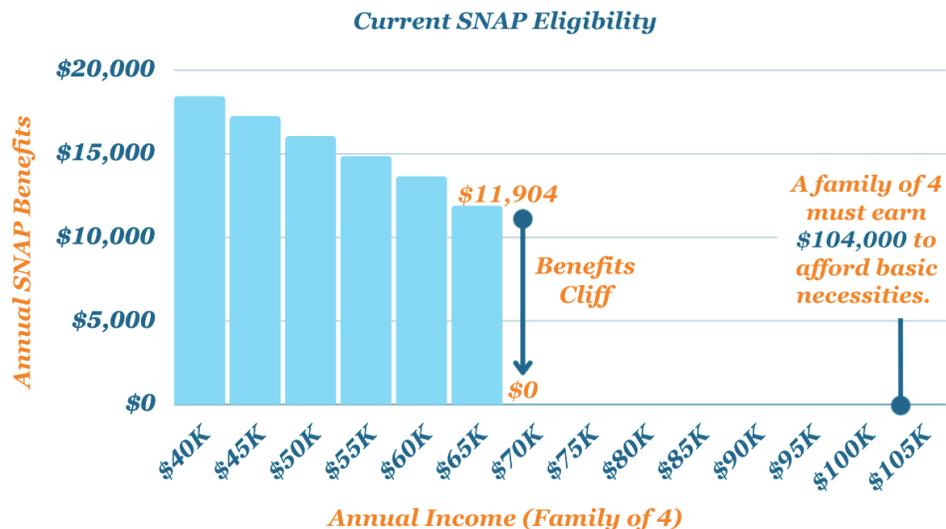
Hrg: Thursday, March 21, 2024 9:30 AM

Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, convened by the Hawai'i Public Health Institute<sup>i</sup> appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **Support of HR31**, which would request the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization (UHERO) to study ways to increase access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

**Helping ALICE families.**

Expanding the SNAP income threshold to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) could help the tens of thousands of people who earn too much to qualify for SNAP, but too little to afford their basic needs. These families need assistance to make ends meet but are not getting it.

In Hawai'i, a family of 4 needs to earn more than \$104,000 to survive financially. In order for that family of 4 to qualify for SNAP benefits, their income cannot exceed 200% of the FPL which is about \$69,000.<sup>iii</sup> Providing SNAP benefits to these "gap" households--with incomes between \$69,000 and \$103,000 for a family of 4--will help them survive. They will have enough money to afford healthy and nutritious groceries.



**Helping those who are eligible but not enrolled.**

Many households eligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have yet to take advantage of this crucial aid, leaving them without additional resources for their grocery needs. This lack of enrollment not only affects these families by depriving them of essential support but also impedes the economic growth of Hawai'i, as potential federal funds remain unspent within the state. By focusing on improving access to and participation in SNAP, we can significantly enhance both the living conditions of Hawai'i's low-income families and the overall economic health of the state.

**Lack of good data.**

Currently we face a significant challenge in estimating the potential increase in SNAP beneficiaries, should eligibility criteria be expanded to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. There is also limited knowledge of the number of eligible individuals and families who have not enrolled in SNAP. Acquiring this data is necessary for the state to develop effective programs to meet the needs of our residents. If provided with this important data, the Department of Human Services could better prepare to serve those who currently lack SNAP access.

**Cooperation is crucial.**

In order for UHERO to do a comprehensive study of SNAP accessibility, they will need access to data that the Department of Human Services, the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and the Department of have. The inclusion of language that would support the cooperation UHERO needs for data gathering is important.

Please consider the following language:

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all relevant state departments and agencies, including the Department of Human Services, Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and the Department of Taxation, are requested to provide access to any information and data that the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization asks for to successfully complete the study.”

We look forward to working with the legislature, UHERO, and other relevant parties to ensure that the study can be conducted without a hitch.

Mahalo for your consideration in helping to improve access to SNAP benefits for Hawai'i residents.

Sincerely,



Nate Hix

Social Impact Policy Manager  
Hawai'i Public Health Insititute

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<sup>i</sup> The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/bessd/snap/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/>