



**Testimony Opposing House Bill 5464
House Families, Children and Seniors Committee**

Peter Ruark

February 8, 2022

Good afternoon. I am Peter Ruark, Senior Policy Analyst at the Michigan League for Public Policy, a statewide research and advocacy organization that promotes economic opportunity for all. The League urges a no vote on House Bill 5464.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services currently requires child support cooperation on the part of custodial parents as a condition of eligibility for food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), unless there is a good cause exemption. This bill would codify the current policy in statute.

We all want parents not living with their children to assist with the responsibility for those children, so requiring a custodial parent to cooperate with child support collection from the noncustodial parent in order to receive food assistance may seem reasonable on its face. However, the negative consequences of doing so outweigh any positive aspects, which is likely why Michigan is one of only eight states that have that policy.

The current requirement and the bill to put it into statute are problematic for a number of reasons:

- Custodial parents who do not engage with child support collection often have a good reason for not doing so, such as fear of abuse. However, they may not know how to apply for a good cause exemption, may fear that the child support agency and/or the noncustodial parent will be contacted anyway, or may have a general fear of getting involved with the court system.
- Custodial parents who have informal payment arrangements with the noncustodial parent may fear that opening a formal child support case may damage the relationship.
- Child support participation among SNAP households is already strong, and nationally, nearly one-fifth of all SNAP households with children receive child support payments. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)
- One study shows that instead of increasing child support payments, a cooperation mandate simply removes food assistance from a significant number of households, leaving those households with fewer resources and their children more vulnerable.

- As SNAP is a federally funded program, pushing down food assistance cases in this way does not save Michigan money, but rather incurs unnecessary expenses. Eliminating the child support compliance requirement for SNAP would relieve Michigan of administrative burden and expense.

The problems described are not just hypothetical. A few years ago, one of our community partners informed our organization that some income-eligible parents are not applying for assistance out of concerns that it will trigger a court case on child support. Some parents have specifically mentioned that they have an informal arrangement with the noncustodial parent that works for them, and fear that applying for the subsidy will create a child support court case they want to avoid.

To save Michigan taxpayers money, to preserve the safety of Michigan's parents and children who are in fragile domestic situations, and to increase food security among families with low incomes, the Michigan League for Public Policy urges Michigan to join the 42 states that do not include a child support requirement in determining eligibility for food assistance. House Bill 5464 moves in exactly the opposite direction, and we urge this committee to vote no.