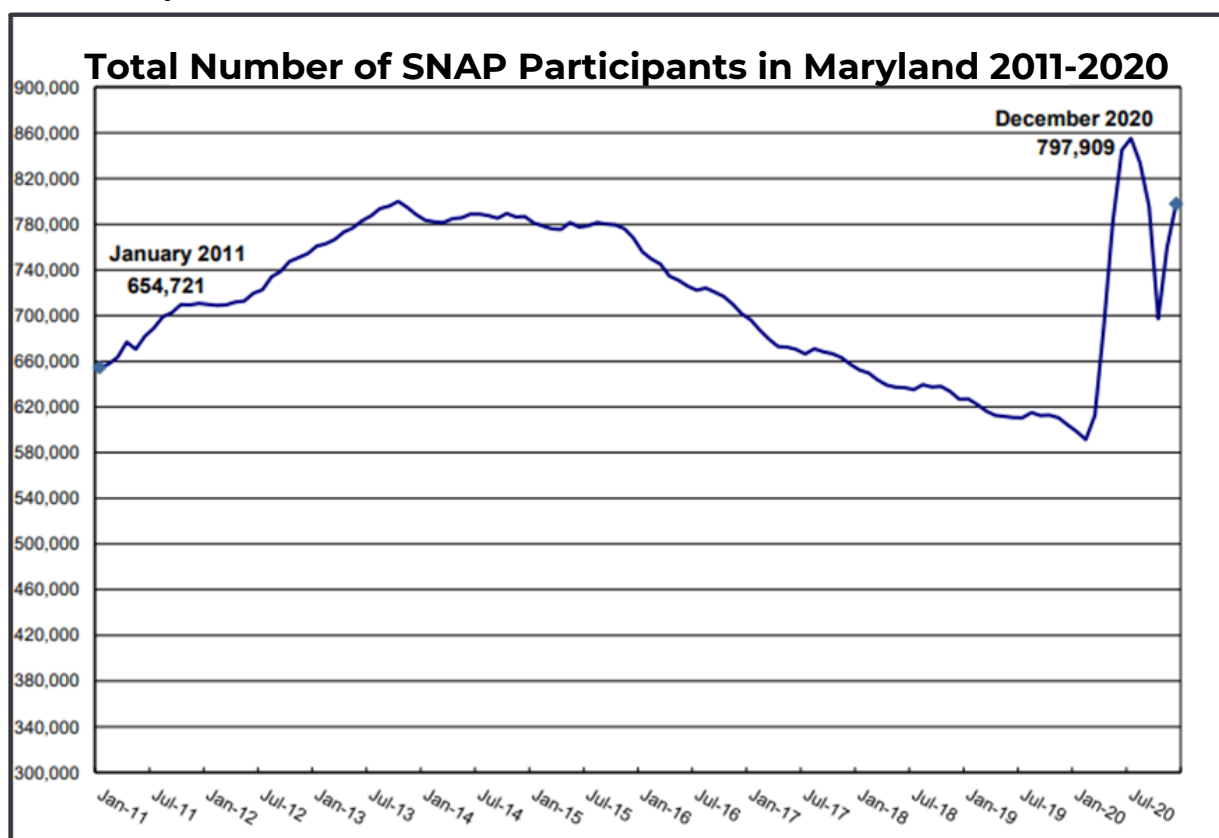


2020: A REFLECTION ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND INCREASING HUNGER

In March of 2020, to minimize the spread of COVID-19, schools and businesses nationwide closed. This resulted in a sudden increase in unemployment. The closures had a devastating effect on individuals, families, and the economy within the state of Maryland. In one month alone, Maryland Hunger Solutions received over 3,000 calls to our toll-free, SNAP (Maryland's Food Supplement Program) application hotline from affected people searching for assistance. Many were first-time applicants. In Maryland, there was a 400% increase in the number of SNAP⁴ applications received in April of 2020, as compared to March 2020 – nearly 150,000 applications. Every county in the state witnessed a surge in need, with Baltimore City seeing increases in SNAP applications of over 600% and Howard County seeing a tripling of the number of applications. By July of 2020, Maryland acquired the most SNAP participants in the state's history—over 855,000* participants or 14% of the state's population.⁴ As of December 2020, there are 797,909 SNAP participants in Maryland.⁴



School closures meant that millions of children lost access to their primary source of daily nutrition – school breakfast and lunch. The existing data show that faith-based organizations, non-profits, governmental agencies, and private schools held a significant role in the distribution of meals to children.³ Overwhelmed schools, food banks, and community groups worked overtime to safely distribute food and meet the need of the newly hungry along with those who were already facing hunger. The intervention of federal nutrition programs – SNAP, Pandemic EBT, SFSP, and WIC, made tangible differences in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Marylanders. What the pandemic has revealed is that these interventions have always made a difference in the lives of Marylanders, but that they are critical during times of crisis. The following profiles provide a snapshot of hunger, poverty, and federal program participation in the context of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

*The exact number of SNAP participants in July 2020 was 856,538.