ASSEMBLY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 2892

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: AUGUST 10, 2020

The Assembly Human Services Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 2892.

This bill establishes a Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), within the New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly the Food Stamp Program), in the Department of Human Services. The RMP is to be administered by the department, in conjunction with the State's county welfare agencies, in a manner consistent with federal statue and regulation, including those requirements outlined in 7 U.S.C. s.2020(e)(25).

Generally, federal law prohibits SNAP benefits from being used to purchase prepared food at restaurants. However, through the RMP, states have the option to allow eligible homeless, disabled, or elderly individuals to use SNAP benefits at approved restaurants that offer food at low or reduced prices. The goal of this program is to provide certain vulnerable SNAP participants, who may not have the means to store and prepare food, access to meals.

Under the bill, the department is required to: 1) annually issue guidance to all county welfare agencies indicating which counties are eligible to participate in the RMP, and instructions for participating in the RMP and appealing a non-eligible determination; and 2) provide that the electronic benefit distribution system used by SNAP recipients to purchase food can also be utilized by participants in the RMP at all approved food vendors.

Under the oversight of the department, each county welfare agency located in an eligible county that elects to participate in the RMP is responsible for determining the number, type, and location of restaurants to include as approved food vendors in the program. County welfare agencies must consider the agency's administrative capacity, the location of participating restaurants, and SNAP recipient demand within the county in making this determination.

Each public or private institution of higher education in the State that is located in an eligible county that elects to participate in the RMP must apply to become an approved food vendor in the program if the institution operates any qualifying on-campus restaurants. Furthermore, the institution must annually: 1) provide all on-campus restaurants not operated by the institution with information regarding the RMP and the manner in which to apply; and 2) inform enrolled

students about the program if an on-campus restaurant has been approved as a food vendor in the RMP.

Under the bill, the Commissioner of Human Services is required to issue a report no later than six months following the effective date of the bill, and annually thereafter, to the Governor and to the Legislature that includes, but is not limited to, the following information regarding the RMP: the counties eligible for participation and those that elect to participate; the names and addresses of all approved food vendors in each participating county; and the number of SNAP recipients participating in the program by county. The report must also specify approved food vendor and participant information regarding the program's implementation at institutions of higher education throughout the State.