



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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APRIL 2016

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Food Stamps)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly food stamp) helps millions of people put food on the table every month. The program provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income families, which can be used to purchase food. Almost 900,000 New Jerseyans rely on SNAP to help meet their nutritional needs.

STATE UPDATE

Although **New Jersey** has taken steps to expand eligibility for SNAP and streamline the application process, only about 77% of those eligible actually participate in the program. New Jersey lags considerably behind the National average of 83% of eligible people accessing SNAP benefits. While processing problems have been improved over the last year, specific cuts to both benefits and limitations to access for certain groups of clients threaten the important nutrition support that is program provides to struggling individuals. This is the third time in the last several years that the SNAP program has been cut in New Jersey. In two of the three instances cuts could have been mitigated at the state level.

ABAWD – Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents

Beginning in January, the State of New Jersey is reinstating the ABAWD rules. This means that all able bodied individuals between the ages of 18 and 50 who have no dependents will have to meet a 20 hour or more work requirement in the form of hours worked, employment training or community service within strict time limits. Failing to comply for more than 3 months will mean loss of benefits for 3 years. **Since ALL SNAP recipients have a work requirement (but do not lose benefits in this same manner without reinstatement) this measure is unnecessary.** More than half of the other states have taken waivers for specific counties or municipalities that have either high unemployment or a lack of training programs to meet the need. Most New Jersey counties would qualify for these waivers. Although recently the state took temporary waivers for 14 counties, those counties not waived and those counties phased in will still affect thousands of people by the end of the year.

HEAT AND EAT

In July 2014, legislation enacted through the Farm Bill further impacted New Jersey residents who also receive the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The Congressional Budget Office estimates that as many as 159,000 such households may have been affected by a reduction for as much as \$90 per month. This change was particularly devastating for seniors and disabled residents living in public housing. New Jersey again was only 1 of 3 states that were affected (15 states total) that did not provide additional funds to eliminate the need for these cuts.

STATE ACTION: The NJ legislature passed the **SNAP Heat and Eat bills (S650/ A1210)**, which would help to increase SNAP benefits for certain households (mostly seniors, people with disabilities and others living in subsidized housing), by investing state dollars thereby allowing them to take the standard utility deduction. The legislature also passed the **SNAP ABAWD (able-bodied adults without dependents) bills (S993/A2777)**, which would require the state to waive 3 month time limits for certain ABAWDs in certain parts of the state where

unemployment remains high. Now, these bills go off to the Governor for his signature. **Please contact Governor Christie and ask him to sign these bills into law!** Visit: <http://nj.gov/governor/contact/> to access Governor Christie's contact information.

FEDERAL ACTION: Ask your Member of Congress to Sign on or support Legislation to Protect SNAP for ABAWDs. There are two bills pending in Congress that can help. While neither bill eliminates the 3 month time limit, they could help individuals subject to this terrible federal law by requiring states to do more than just cut people's benefits.

1) House bill **HR1025**, SNAP Work Opportunity Program, would require states to actually offer a state job, an education/training program and/or a community service site before terminating the SNAP benefits.

2) Senate Bill **S2420**, SNAP Work Opportunity and Veterans Protection Act, would require the same with additional protections for veterans.

Improved Child Nutrition Programs

On September 30, 2015 the child nutrition bill expired. This legislation helps feed millions of children by supporting school nutrition programs, summer food, child care programs and WIC. While programs are funded through the end of 2016 at current levels, congress continues to work towards comprehensive improvements to the program through reauthorization.

The Senate Agriculture Committee has passed the **Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016** unanimously (bipartisan). Now it can move to the floor for a vote by the full Senate.

The bill provides a strong foundation of program improvements—especially for summer and other out-of-school programs including streamlining paperwork for community providers, enabling non-congregant feeding in some cases as well as an EBT card option for summer food in some areas and a pilot to provide an additional meal for a longer summer day. The limitations are a very, very slow rollout of the improvements over time. The House Agriculture Committee has yet to actively work on this legislation.

FEDERAL ACTION: Using Feeding America's toll free number, **(888) 398-8702**, listen to the pre-recorded message and enter your zip code when prompted. Tell your elected official to support the **Child Nutrition Integrity Access Act of 2016 and also to protect SNAP benefits from harmful cuts or policy changes.**

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