Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

ACTION NEEDED:
Urge your members of Congress and the administration to support counties’ role in the federal, state and local partnership in administering and financing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

BACKGROUND:
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is an entitlement program that offers nutrition assistance to millions of low-income individuals and families. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the program in partnership with states, 10 of which delegate that responsibility to counties: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin. These 10 county-administered states account for 31 percent of all SNAP program participants. Counties operating SNAP often contribute significant levels of local funds to meet the administrative and supplemental costs of running the program.

SNAP is an important program that not only helps struggling families put food on the table but effectively and efficiently stimulates the economy during times of downturn and natural disasters, as families in need can quickly access and spend benefits. In addition to providing food assistance for millions of low-income families, elderly Americans and individuals with disabilities, SNAP supports self-sufficiency through Employment and Training (E&T) programs that help participants gain skills, training or work experience and equip them for regular, sustained employment.

To be eligible for SNAP, participants must have income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level and may not possess assets exceeding $2,250 ($3,500 for households with an elderly or disabled member), with certain exceptions. However, an option called Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) allows states to forego verification of these asset requirements and/or expand income eligibility up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line if SNAP applicants qualify for non-cash Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or state maintenance of effort-funded benefits. SNAP participants must also
fulfill work requirements, such as registering for work, accepting a suitable job if offered one, not voluntarily quitting a job without good cause and not reducing work participation below 30 hours a week. There are exemptions for certain groups such as students, those caring for children under age 6, individuals over age 59 and participants in alcohol or drug treatment programs. Able bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs)—individuals aged 18-49 deemed work-eligible and not living with children—are subject to additional requirements. ABAWDs are limited to participating in SNAP for three out of 36 months unless they are working or participating in unpaid work through a state approved program or an E&T program for at least 20 hours per week.

While SNAP is an entitlement program, it still receives funding annually through the congressional appropriations process. In the wake of a government shutdown in January 2019 that caused a lapse in SNAP funding, Congress included a provision in its Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations bill to make SNAP reserve funds available for three years to provide certainty in case of a future shutdown. SNAP's authorization will expire on September 30, 2023.

COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic led to a drastic increase in household food insecurity in the United States, leading Congress to allocate billions of dollars in supplemental funding for nutrition assistance as well as various flexibilities for the states and counties responsible for administering these programs. SNAP work requirements are waived for the duration of the national health emergency, almost every state is now allowing SNAP online grocery purchasing, and states can also seek permission to perform interviews over the phone, utilize telephonic signatures, delay recertification for existing participants, and provide emergency benefit increases to households up to the maximum monthly allotment. Additionally, Congress authorized the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program, which provides monthly SNAP benefits to low-income children who have lost access to free/reduced price meals at school or child care due to the pandemic. Most recently, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 increased SNAP benefits by 15 percent until June 2021. President Biden also issued an Executive Order (EO) directing USDA to increase Pandemic-EBT benefits by 15 percent.

The Budget Reconciliation under current consideration by Congress would extend the SNAP benefit increase through September 30, 2021 and ensure the P-EBT program serves children through the summer months. It would also provide important relief to counties and states with $1.1 billion in additional administrative funding to be allocated through 2023.

KEY TALKING POINTS
SNAP helps provide food assistance as well as employment and training programs for low-income individuals and families. Nearly 70 percent of the households participating in SNAP include children.

States and counties should maintain flexibility in designing and implementing the program according to their needs and economic context, including the discretion to streamline administrative and application processes with other social service programs.

Families participating in SNAP often face multiple barriers to self-sufficiency and can struggle to meet SNAP’s full work and participation requirements. States and counties should continue to receive flexibility in waiving SNAP work requirements to meet the individual needs of their caseloads.

In county-administered states, counties often contribute substantial local funds to administrative and supplemental costs of the SNAP program.

Increased funding and flexibility for the SNAP program during the COVID-19 pandemic is critically important for county human service agencies to meet increased need and while facing operational challenges.

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