

2019 POLICY BRIEF

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) REAUTHORIZATION AND APPROPRIATIONS

QUICK FACTS

- SNAP provides nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities
- SNAP benefits are county-administered in the following states: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin
- Although SNAP is county-administered in only 10 states, 31 percent of all SNAP recipients reside in those states
- The block granting of SNAP would leave struggling families with less access to food and shift costs onto states and counties

ACTION NEEDED:

Urge your members of Congress and the administration to support counties in the federal, state and local partnership and financing of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP was reauthorized as part of the 2018 farm bill and largely preserved the program's existing entitlement and funding structure.

BACKGROUND:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is an entitlement program that offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Although SNAP is primarily a partnership between the federal government and states, there are 10 states that share SNAP administration with county agencies: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin. Despite being county-administered in only 10 states, 31 percent of all SNAP recipients reside in those states. In these states, counties often contribute significant local funds to administrative and supplemental costs of running the program.

SNAP is an important program aimed at helping struggling families and has proven to be one of the most effective federal programs because benefits can reach families quickly during economic downturns as well as natural disasters. In FY 2016, almost 45 million individuals received services supported by SNAP. Of that 45 million, nearly 70 percent of participants were in families with children and more than one-quarter were in households with seniors or people with disabilities.

In addition to guaranteeing food assistance for millions of low-income families, elderly Americans and individuals with disabilities, SNAP also assists individuals by providing job training and readiness through Employment and Training (E&T) programs. SNAP E&T programs help food stamp recipients gain skills, training or experience and increase their ability to obtain regular and sustained employment. SNAP E&T funds can also be used to provide enhanced individualized services to program participants.

SNAP eligibility is tied to the federal poverty level, a measure of income issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Although states can administer SNAP in different ways, applicants must meet the eligibility requirements mandated by Congress. The two federal requirements to qualify for SNAP are that gross monthly income generally must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (households with an elderly or disabled member are exempt) and net monthly income, or income after deductions, must be less than or equal to the poverty level.

In addition to income requirements as a form of eligibility, participants must also fulfill work requirements to be eligible for SNAP. There are two types of work requirements



for SNAP: general work requirements and the “Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) time limit.” General work requirements include 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. Under ABAWD time limit requirements, ABAWDs not physically or mentally unfit for work or caring for a minor are only eligible for SNAP benefits if they work at least 20 hours per week, participate in an E&T program for at least 20 hours per week or participate in unpaid work through a state-approved program. Additionally, under the ABAWD time limit requirement, ABAWDs are ineligible for SNAP if he/she receives three months of SNAP benefits within a 36-month period and are not working.

While SNAP is an entitlement program, it is still funded through the annual appropriations process in Congress. Over the past several years, some congressional budgets have called for converting SNAP from an entitlement program into a block grant. Currently, the federal government shares the cost of SNAP benefits with states and counties; as demand for these benefits increases, the federal government's share of these costs increases accordingly. If the program is converted into a block grant, states would receive a capped amount of SNAP funding that would not fluctuate despite demand for the program. As a result, under a block grant, states and counties would either have to increase their own funding for the program or decrease benefit levels provided to recipients.

SNAP was reauthorized as part of the 2018 farm bill, which did not include proposals that would have made changes to SNAP program eligibility and implemented stricter work requirements. The farm bill's current authorization will expire on September 30, 2023.

KEY TALKING POINTS

- SNAP provides funding to states to help provide food assistance to low-income individuals and families and allows states to design and implement the program according to their needs.

- Many SNAP families struggle with multiple barriers to self-sufficiency, such as disabilities, mental health issues, domestic violence and substance abuse disorders. As a result, these families may not always be able to meet the full work and participation requirements. States and counties should be given the flexibility in SNAP work requirements in order to allow counties and states 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 program
- If SNAP is converted into a block grant, this would force states and counties to either increase their own funding for the program or decrease the level of benefits provided to recipients

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