

Farm Bill Cuts to SNAP Will Increase Hunger in New York State

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[House Resolution 2, The 2018 Farm Bill](#), released by Chairman of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture, K. Michael Conaway (R-TX) and passed out of the House Committee on Agriculture on April 18th, would make significant changes to the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) and increase hunger across the country.

Food insecurity and hunger are significant issues that threaten the health, well-being and future opportunities of Americans of all ages from urban and rural communities alike. USDA's Economic Research Service reports that 42 million individuals nationwide—13 million of them children—experience food insecurity, including 2.5 million New Yorkers.¹ Many of these people turn to government and private programs to prevent hunger, but our local Food Banks and pantries serve just one meal to every twelve meals that are provided by SNAP, illustrating the enormous power of SNAP to provide basic food needs for millions. If enacted, H.R. 2 would cut aid and erect new red-tape barriers to providing vital food assistance for the 2.9 million SNAP recipients² in NYS who live in every [New York Congressional District](#).³

H.R. 2 cuts more than \$20 billion nationally over 10 years by making changes to SNAP.

- **\$4.8 billion in SNAP food benefits are cut by rolling back broad-based categorical eligibility.** This option has allowed NYS to adjust asset tests and raise SNAP's income limits based on the unique needs of our state, extending the program to more low-income working families with children, seniors and people with disabilities. In our high-cost-of-living state, where we have a higher minimum wage (and one that is on track to reach \$15 an hour in most parts of the state by 2021)⁴ this change would re-impose a "benefit cliff" for working families that forces households off SNAP when even a modest increase in wages or hours puts their earnings above 130% of poverty. The rise in earnings is more than canceled out by the loss of food benefits, leaving families worse off financially than they were before.

In New York:

- ✓ A minimum of 34,000 current SNAP households would lose benefits under this provision, amounting to an estimated loss of \$54 million in federal SNAP dollars annually. This estimate does not account for the many other families who will find themselves not eligible for food assistance as the minimum wage in NYS continues to rise.

¹ http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/2015/MMG_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2015_2/NY_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2015.pdf

² https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_new_york.pdf

³ <https://hungersolutionsny.org/snap-policy/snap-district-data-sheets/>

⁴ <https://www.labor.ny.gov/workerprotection/laborstandards/workprot/minwage.shtm>

- ✓ More than half of these households include children, who would also lose automatic eligibility for free school meals.
- ✓ H.R.2 reinstates asset tests in NYS and a vehicle test for all households receiving SNAP:
 - Reinstates and raises an asset test of \$7,000 per household or \$12,000 for households with an elderly or disabled member. Reinstating an asset test will significantly increase documentation requirements.
 - Reinstates and raises a vehicle test which will count a car's fair market value (FMV) above \$12,000 toward the total asset test maximums. NYS currently allows families to have one car per adult who is working and/or participating in school or training.

Altogether, this proposal imposes stricter eligibility rules by eliminating state flexibility and undercutting the substantial progress that federal and state policymakers have made in simplifying the program, particularly for working poor households, by reducing administrative burdens and paperwork for both SNAP caseworkers and recipients alike.

• **\$5.3 billion in SNAP food benefits are cut by eliminating the connection between SNAP and the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).** For decades, federal law has made households who receive LIHEAP automatically eligible for the Heating/Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (HCSUA). This automation reduces unnecessary paperwork for states and low-income families, but the bill would end this simplification and require all SNAP applicants (except for seniors) to provide documentation of utility costs to continue receiving a SUA deduction.

In New York:

- ✓ An estimated 467,000 households will lose their eligibility for the HCSUA, and between 55%-60% of these households will lose SNAP benefits, amounting to a total annual loss of approximately \$270 million in federal SNAP dollars.

• **\$9.2 billion in SNAP food benefits are cut by imposing new, mandatory work requirements** and time limits on people age 18 to 59 who are not disabled or raising a child under age 6. These SNAP recipients will have to prove every month that they are working or participating in a qualifying SNAP employment and training activity for at least 20 hours a week.

H.R. 2 would expand who is required to meet a 20 hour per week work requirement to include parents with children aged 6 and over and adults aged 50 through 59. The bill would shorten the compliance period from three months to one month and would impose this requirement in more areas with high unemployment rates. It would also impose harsh sanctions on those who can't comply; after one month, individuals who cannot meet the 20-hour per week rule will lose SNAP benefits for one year. Each subsequent infraction would lock the individual out of the program for three years. The only way an otherwise eligible individual can regain benefits is by proving consistent 20-hour/week employment or documenting that they meet an exemption.

These sweeping, aggressive new work requirements would take away food assistance from those who fail to prove that they have worked enough hours or qualify for an exemption. These harsh rules would apply to hundreds of thousands of SNAP participants in NYS, putting at risk parents and their kids,

caregivers, older workers, and people who are already working but can't get enough hours at work to meet the requirement.

NYS would be forced to develop a large new bureaucracy that would need to track hundreds of thousands of SNAP recipients each month. There is scant evidence that this approach would lead to increases in long-term employment rates, and would be particularly handicapped by the insufficient funding provided.⁵

In New York:

- ✓ If this rule were applied in 2016, in a typical month, approximately *544,000 non-disabled adults without children under age six would need to be tracked by SNAP offices.
- ✓ CBO estimates that the national SNAP caseload will decline by 17% between 2016 and 2021. If you apply that decline to the estimated 395,000 adults who would need a work or training slot based on 2016 rolls this number is estimated to be **327,850 adults of which about half (163,925 adults) would require a work or training slot to continue to receive food assistance through SNAP.
- ✓ If approximately 163,925 SNAP recipients per month in NYS needed work slots, it would cost more than \$68 million per month, or \$820 million per year (based on TANF estimates of \$5,000 per year per person). NYS is slated to receive just \$54 million per year under this bill.
- ✓ Additionally, because NYS is a county-administered state, counties would be responsible for a significant portion of the administrative and training costs.

*This number includes adults who would not have been subject to the work requirements in 2016 including people ages 50 to 59, families with children age 6 and older, childless adults who live in areas of the state waived from ABAWD rules and those receiving an individual exemption from the time limit rule.

**This number includes adults who would not be subject to the work requirements in 2021, due to being exempt from the rule, living in a waived areas of the state, or receiving an individual exemption. This estimate is very conservative, and likely underestimates the impact in New York.

These sweeping new work requirements do not reflect the fact that most working-age SNAP recipients, who can work, are indeed working, and that SNAP plays a vital role in supporting them when they are underemployed or are between jobs.⁶ Experience suggests these new work rules would leave substantial numbers of low-income people who have various barriers to employment – such as limited skills, unreliable transportation, or family members with illness – with neither earnings nor food assistance.

• **\$3.8 billion in SNAP food benefits are cut by mandating child support cooperation.** Current law allows states to deny SNAP assistance to non-custodial parents who are not in compliance with child support, but currently, 45 states and the District of Columbia, including New York, have chosen not to take this option. This proposal would now require these non-custodial parents cooperate with child support enforcement (CSE) to receive benefits.

States like New York have long had serious concerns about the high costs associated with implementing the option, the limited evidence of its impact on child support collections, and the risk to

⁵ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/house-agriculture-committees-farm-bill-would-increase-food-insecurity-and>

⁶ For resources on SNAP and work, see <https://www.cbpp.org/resources-on-snap-and-work>.

children in these families. When parents lose food assistance for non-cooperation, children stand to get hurt. Sanctioning parents' SNAP benefits reduces a family's overall food budget and puts children at increased risk of food insecurity and inadequate nutrition. Consistent access to adequate nutrition in childhood is associated with important long-term outcomes including greater educational achievement and better health.⁷

In New York:

- ✓ Currently, over 200,000 SNAP households contain single parents with children who are not in the child support system.
- ✓ Parents are required to risk work for child support orders which will provide them with little to no benefit. Single parents will be required to miss 4 to 5 days of work to file petitions and make multiple court appearances to get an order that is often minimal. Low-income parents do not have paid leave days and going to court means that their families suffer economically and puts them at risk of losing their SNAP benefits due to the proposed and current work rules.
- ✓ If this mandatory child support proposal was put into effect in NYS, it would represent at least a 30% increase in the child support caseload. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that states would be on the hook to pick up \$3.7 billion (about one-third) of the cost to implement this new requirement, being forced to make the necessary system changes, and hire more staff, including a substantial increase in child support personnel to work newly opened cases. The unfeasibility of this policy is demonstrated in a 2014 report commissioned by Utah to study the value and potential impact of mandatory child support cooperation in SNAP.⁸ The Utah study projected that imposing a child support cooperation requirement in the state's SNAP program would take a significant number of adults off food assistance, but few of them would end up receiving additional funds from child support payments, a dynamic that would leave children more vulnerable.

Policymakers should consider the reasons why states like New York have not adopted this mandate: the high administrative costs required to implement relative to the modest possible benefits to SNAP households, and the risks to children that SNAP serves. These realities argue against imposing this mandate on states (in NYS on counties) that have already chosen not to use this approach, based on their assessment of the costs and benefits.

New Yorker's Should Oppose H.R.2

SNAP is a highly effective program targeted to households that need help in meeting basic food needs. With an average benefit of just \$1.50 per person per meal, it lifts millions out of poverty, and it has demonstrated long-term benefits for children who participate, including better health and higher

⁷ Steven Carlson *et al.*, "SNAP Works for America's Children," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, September 29, 2016, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-works-for-americas-children>.

⁸ Rodney W. Hopkins, "Food Stamp Child Support Cooperation Study," Social Research Institute, University of Utah, August 29, 2014.

educational achievement. While its enrollment and spending are falling as the economy improves,⁹ SNAP provides vital assistance to over 2.9 million low-income New Yorkers.

The Committee's nutrition title includes benefit cuts and harsh new work requirements that, among other problems, would hurt many poor working families, children, and individuals who struggle to find stable employment. Coming just a few months after the tax-cut law, which will mainly benefit the wealthy and profitable corporations, this proposal represents the wrong vision for the country, one that would increase hardship and further widen inequality.

Resources:

- For more details on the SNAP proposals in H.R. 2 see the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Analysis here: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/house-agriculture-committees-farm-bill-would-increase-food-insecurity-and>
- For additional resources including district level information and action alerts see our SNAP and Farm Bill page: <https://hungersolutionsny.org/snap-policy/>

⁹ Dottie Rosenbaum, "SNAP Caseloads and Spending Declines Track CBO Projections," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 22, 2017, <http://www.cbpp.org/blog/snap-caseloads-and-spending-declines-track-cbo-projections>.