



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

This message is being sent to network public policy personnel.

**APRIL 2016**

### **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Food Stamps)**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) helps millions of people put food on the table every month. The program provides monthly benefits for eligible low-income families to purchase food. Almost 900,000 New Jerseyans rely on SNAP to 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 behind the national average of 83% of eligible people who access SNAP benefits. While processing problems have been improved over the past year, specific cuts to benefits and access limitations for certain groups threaten the program. This is the third time in the last several years that the SNAP program has received cuts 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, New Jersey reinstated the ABAWD rules. This means that all able-bodied individuals between the ages of 18 and 50 who do not have dependents need to meet a 20-hour minimum work requirement in the form of hours worked, employment training or community service, all within strict time limits. Failing to comply for more than 3 months will lead to a loss of benefits for 3 years.

**Because ALL SNAP recipients have a work requirement (but do not lose benefits in this same manner and without reinstatement) this measure is unnecessary.** More than half of the other states have taken waivers for specific counties or municipalities that either have high unemployment rates or a lack of training programs. Most New Jersey counties would qualify for these waivers. Although the state recently took temporary waivers for 14 counties, thousands in the counties not waived – or in those phased in – will be affected 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 of as much as \$90 per month. This change was particularly devastating for seniors and disabled residents living in public housing. New Jersey was only 1 of 3 states affected that did not provide additional funds to eliminate the need for these cuts (15 states total).

#### **STATE ACTION:**

The New Jersey Legislature passed the **SNAP Heat and Eat bills (S650/ A1210)** to help increase SNAP benefits for certain households (mostly for seniors, people with disabilities and those living in subsidized housing) by investing state dollars, allowing them to take the standard utility deduction. The Legislature also passed the **SNAP ABAWD (Able-Bodied Adults**

**Without Dependents) bills (S993/A2777)**, requiring the state to waive 3-month time limits for certain ABAWDs in specific parts of the state where unemployment remains high.

Now, these bills go off to the Governor for his signature. **Please contact Governor Chris Christie and ask him to sign these bills into law!** Visit: <http://nj.gov/governor/contact/> to access his 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 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 state jobs, education/training programs and/or community service sites before terminating 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, summer food, child care and WIC programs. While these are funded through the end of 2016 at current levels, Congress continues to work toward comprehensive improvements 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 for improvements, especially for summer and other out-of-school programs. Such enhancements include streamlining paperwork for community providers, enabling non-congregant feeding in some cases, adding an EBT card option for summer food in certain areas, and piloting a program that provides an extra meal during the summer. 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 protect SNAP benefits from harmful cuts or policy changes.**

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