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USDA restriction on states' SNAP administration weakens national safety net

INDIANAPOLIS (Dec. 5, 2019) – Leadership for the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) denounces this week's final rule from the USDA that will cost more than 1 million adults their SNAP benefits, in direct contradiction of congressional intent.

An estimated [1.2 million fewer adults](#) would receive SNAP benefits under the USDA's [final rule](#), issued Wednesday, largely because of stricter mandatory work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents ([ABAWDs](#)). This rapid loss of SNAP benefits will exaggerate [food insecurity](#) among ABAWDs when they are navigating uncertain job prospects and [a slowing economy](#). It would also impose financial hardship on states enforcing these stricter rules, weaken states' ability to respond to deteriorating economic conditions, and cost [retail food outlets](#) millions of dollars.

"Actively involved in nutrition education and health promotion, our members have seen first-hand the tremendous administrative, food security and health benefits of SNAP," said SNEB President Jennifer Wilkins, PhD, RD. "This significant slash in eligibility would be detrimental to the Americans who depend on this essential program to make ends meet."

Congress had intense deliberations leading up to the [2018 Farm Bill](#) regarding stricter work requirements imposed on ABAWDs unable to find work, and ultimately rejected such a controversial change by a historic vote of 87-13 in the Senate and by 369-47 in the House of Representatives. The publishing of this final rule, which received more than 100,000 public comments, [should](#) invoke a legislative and possibly judicial response challenging the USDA's authority to supersede congressional intent.

Attention must also be given to evaluating the immediate impacts of this drastic rule change, given our nation's objective research agency – the [USDA Economic Research Service \(ERS\)](#) – has been [relocated, and more than 80%](#) of ERS employees left the agency.

"Any issues with SNAP work requirements should have been fixed in a manner that respects congressional intent and still permits certain degrees of state administrative autonomy," SNEB's Board of Directors said in a unified statement with its Advisory Committee on Public Policy. "This includes awaiting the recent [Farm Bill](#) investments in employment and training pilots, which will hopefully provide better insights on how to grant states flexibility and other administrative supports necessary to meet their constituents' food security *and* employment needs through administering SNAP, among other safety net programs."

SNAP provides nutrition assistance to nearly 40 million eligible individuals and families each month. [Eighty percent](#) of SNAP households include a child, an elderly individual or an individual with a disability, and these households received 85% of SNAP benefits.

Known as an “[automatic economic stabilizer](#),” SNAP helps [lift](#) individuals out of poverty, “[put food on the table](#)” and [reduces](#) very low food security. [Most](#) working-age adults in SNAP who can work do, often for low pay, without benefits, and unstable schedules. [Research demonstrates](#) that even when these Americans are employed full-time, they are often underemployed and still need food and nutrition assistance.

“We encourage the USDA to develop innovative intra-governmental collaborations and public-private partnerships to address the root causes of unemployment and explore how best to utilize a program aimed at preventing food insecurity as a means of transitioning participants with a range of marketable skills and life circumstances into more stable and stronger workforce situations. We also encourage the USDA to focus more on promising policy, programmatic and resource allocation strategies that strengthen the economic, food security and other public health impacts of SNAP.”

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Journalists interested in further comment or setting up an interview can reach out to SNEB President Jennifer Wilkins at president@sneb.org; Executive Director Rachel Daeger at rdaeger@sneb.org; or Senior Communications Coordinator Evan Hoffmeyer at ehoffmeyer@sneb.org.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY FOR NUTRITION EDUCATION AND BEHAVIOR

The Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior is an international organization of nutrition education professionals who are dedicated to advancing food and nutrition education research, practice and policy that promote equity, and support public and planetary health. To learn more, visit www.sneb.org.