

For more than four decades the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP,” or food stamps) has been a fundamental bulwark for the poorest and hungriest people in our nation. Deemed “a government reform that worked” by the National Journal, the program serves as the nation’s first line of defense against hunger.

SNAP has extraordinary strengths.

It reduces hunger and food insecurity by providing very low-income people desperately needed, targeted assistance to purchase food at groceries, farmers markets and other regular commercial food outlets, through an effective and efficient electronic benefit transfer system.

Because SNAP benefits are so urgently needed by families, they are spent quickly—97 percent of benefits are redeemed by the end of the month of issuance—thereby bolstering local economies.

Estimates issued by Moody’s Analytics and others of the economic growth impact of SNAP during a recession range from \$1.73 to \$1.79 per \$1 of SNAP benefits.

When the national economy or a regional, state or area economy is in trouble, the program is among the most effective government responses. It reacts quickly and robustly to economic problems. This has been seen most clearly and dramatically since the start of the recession in 2008, when millions of people became newly unemployed or underemployed. The program responded quickly to provide desperately needed help in the downturn.

There is the same responsiveness when disasters strike, as occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Disaster SNAP responded quickly and effectively to meet the increased need in Gulf Coast states.

SNAP is targeted to go to the neediest people in our country. 92 percent of benefits go to households with incomes below the poverty line. This includes millions of working poor families.

It reaches key vulnerable populations— one-third of SNAP participants are in households that include senior citizens or people with disabilities; three-quarters of participants are in families with children.

While losing a job is the most common event causing a household to seek SNAP, 52 percent of SNAP households with children in 2013 worked and had earnings; only 11 percent of households with children received welfare.

Research has found that receipt of SNAP in early childhood improved high school graduation rates, adult earnings, and adult health.

SNAP lifted 4.7 million Americans out of poverty in 2014. SNAP is nearly as effective as the Earned Income Tax Credit in lifting families above the poverty line, and far more effective than any other program in lifting families out of deep poverty.

Why Congress Must Support & Strengthen SNAP

It relieves pressure on overwhelmed food banks, pantries, religious congregations and other emergency food providers across the country. They recognize SNAP as the cornerstone of national, state and local anti-hunger efforts, and are the first to note their inability to meet added demand that would come from weakening SNAP. Program integrity is at record levels and a model for other government and private sector programs. Fewer than one percent of benefits go to households that should have been found ineligible.

Oppose cuts and support proposals to strengthen SNAP

There has been much talk about reducing SNAP spending, changing the SNAP structure, or tightening rules around eligibility and benefits. Cuts to SNAP would harm not just beneficiaries, but would damage states, localities, the food industry, American agriculture, and food retailers. They would cost jobs. They would roll back a generation of progress in this nation against very deep hunger. They would destroy a bipartisan compact that for two generations has developed and sustained a strong and effective national nutrition safety net. They would reduce nutritional quality for poor families even while our nation struggles with problems of obesity and resulting health costs.

If it is weakened, many millions of seniors, people with disabilities, children, struggling parents – working and unemployed – and others will suffer. If SNAP is weakened, our country will see more hunger and poverty, worse health and educational outcomes, and higher health costs. The nation as a whole will be weaker – morally, economically and fiscally.

We oppose changes that would harm needy people, increase hunger, and dilute the program's strengths described above. We support key proposals to strengthen the program:

1. The President's budget, which proposes \$83.692 billion for SNAP, which is estimated to serve an average caseload of 45.7 million individuals and support the current 83 percent participation rate among eligible people. Support the President's new SNAP initiatives seeking:
 - \$9 million for state options to streamline application processes for the elderly;
 - \$25 million for states transitioning off ABAWD (Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents) high jobless area waivers to help them bolster Employment & Training (E&T) services for certain adults facing time limits on SNAP benefits;
 - \$1.5 million for SNAP E&T Center for Excellence.
2. Legislation that would improve SNAP benefits, including a bill (H.R. 3657) to require SNAP benefits be calculated with reference to the cost of the low-cost food plan rather than the inadequate Thrifty Food Plan.
3. Legislation to ameliorate the harsh time limits on benefits for ABAWDs willing to work, in addition to funding the President's ABAWD initiative.