

Approved | February 27, 2017

Resolution to Clarify and Expand NACo Policy on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Issue: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is critical to struggling families and has proven to be one of the most countercyclical federal programs because benefits can reach families quickly during economic downturns as well as natural disasters. Counties should be considered an integral partner as Congress begins reauthorization of SNAP.

Adopted Policy: NACo supports moving a SNAP reauthorization in conjunction with a reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

NACo supports the current SNAP entitlement program and funding structure, including maintaining the 50 percent federal administrative match for states, given that counties contribute to the administrative costs of the SNAP program in many county-administered states. SNAP should not be block granted, since such a policy change would place additional strain on both recipients and state and local governments. As the introductory statement says, SNAP is indeed a very responsive countercyclical program, as evidenced by the large increases in SNAP participants during the great recession in the late 2000's and early 2010's. Block granting would seriously undermine that responsiveness, leaving struggling families with less access to food and further weakening the economy since SNAP families redeem their benefits quickly and locally. Moreover, counties would see shifts in costs to support those households if the already low benefit is reduced under a block grant.

NACo encourages Congress to increase the options available to state and local administrative bodies in streamlining applications and administrative processes. Local social services departments see many individuals and families that are eligible for multiple programs, but requirements are often slightly different for each program, generating significant work for staff and applicants alike. All states should be allowed to seamlessly enroll Supplemental Security Income (SSI) participants in the SNAP program. In general, as additional programs are streamlined, barriers to entry for participants should be reduced, and Congress and states should not make the most restrictive elements of each program the qualifications required for approval.

Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) should work to reduce "churn" – the rolling of recipients on and off of the program – in the SNAP program, which can be a burden for recipients and administrators alike. Administration and application processes should be simplified to allow individuals reapplying for benefits to enter a streamlined process, reducing the time between application and receiving benefits while also reducing administrative costs.

Proper nutrition is crucial to high quality early childhood development goals and ensures children are mentally and physically prepared to learn when entering school. SNAP benefits for families should be at an adequate level so that all children have healthy diets.

NACo opposes arbitrary and counterproductive work and participation requirements and supports a strong county role in mutually negotiated outcome measures in which states are judged by their progress toward achieving agreed upon goals. NACo supports greater flexibility in the SNAP work requirements in order to allow counties and states to meet the individual needs of their caseloads.

NACo supports enabling individuals to find and secure long-term employment and encourages Congress to acknowledge the reality that for time-limited assistance to be successful, it must be accompanied by adequate federal and state funding for a wide range of supportive services. The SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program should receive more realistic funding levels from the federal government to ensure states and counties have the proper resources to assist individuals in finding work and remaining employed, including increasing the reimbursement rate, since SNAP E&T is an employment program. SNAP E&T should also be further integrated with existing workforce programs at the federal, state and local level, including local workforce development boards.

In addition to the increased reimbursement rates for employment programs, NACo supports lengthening the time limit for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) and making the work requirements more flexible. Often, rapid attachment employment programs are short term, and individuals who find work do not remain employed because they have not developed the required skills. Allowing for increased training and an extended time limit would make employment goals more realistic. Additionally, NACo supports a tax incentive for employers who hire ABAWD SNAP participants for 20 hours or more each month, which could be increased based on the number of ABAWD participants hired. NACo also supports allowing counties in county-administered states to apply for a waiver for the ABAWD time limits if the state does not apply for a state-wide or partial waiver.

Lifetime disqualification from the SNAP program can have a lasting effect not just on the individual, but also on his or her family. NACo supports additional flexibility in disqualification determinations for states and local governments. NACo also supports lifting the lifetime ban on individuals with felony drug convictions in all states.

Recipients of federal benefits programs often face a financial “cliff” as they gain employment – the boundary line at which point individuals or families lose benefits given their rise in income. NACo urges Congress to consider gradual phase outs of certain programs, including SNAP, to ease the transition from benefits to income, especially for families.

NACo urges Congress and the FNS to pursue solutions that address the specific obstacles rural communities face in ensuring access to food and healthy eating habits in rural areas, which often lack access to healthy food options. States with large rural populations and rural counties should be afforded additional flexibility in the administration of the SNAP program to help combat these challenges.

Among federal benefits programs, SNAP is already a leader in innovation and simplification of benefits, including the use of SNAP Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. The federal government should continue to play a leading role in developing technology that makes program

administration more seamless. By pioneering advances at the federal level, the program would be streamlined in states and local jurisdictions across the country.

NACo supports the goals of maintaining low levels of fraud and error rates within the SNAP program. Counties believe that a federal commitment to streamlining the program, increased technological advances and additional flexibility to eliminate systemic program issues (including program churn) will help achieve this goal.

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