



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Denounces Trump Administration Attacks on Food Assistance Programs

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller today joined anti-hunger advocates to discuss the Wolf Administration’s opposition to the Trump Administration’s numerous attacks on the Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP), the most important anti-hunger program in the country, and the potential effects of these changes on people around Pennsylvania. More than 1.7 million Pennsylvanians rely on SNAP to access food, including about 700,000 children, about 690,000 people with disabilities, and about 300,000 older adults.

The Trump Administration has proposed two rules and has enacted a third that will jeopardize access to SNAP:

- Last week, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published a final rule that restricts states’ ability to determine which counties can be waived from work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents, which are waived due to local unemployment rates.
- In October, the USDA issued a proposed rule to alter the method Pennsylvania uses to determine the Heating/Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA), which considers utility costs when calculating a person’s monthly SNAP benefit.
- In July, the USDA announced a proposed rule that would eliminate Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) for SNAP, which is a policy that gives states the flexibility to determine appropriate income thresholds and extend SNAP benefits to low-income families and individuals who would otherwise struggle to afford food.

“Every one of these rule changes forces people who are already in difficult positions to make the unconscionable choice of paying for food or paying for other necessities like utilities, rent, or medicine. Instead of modernizing and making SNAP more accessible for people who need it, the Trump Administration is enacting draconian rule changes that take away a state’s ability to meet the needs of its own citizens.” said Secretary Miller “The Wolf Administration is vehemently opposed to any and all attacks on this vital program, and we will always be committed to protecting SNAP and supporting the people who need it.”

The Trump Administration last week enacted changes to SNAP that limit states’ ability to determine which counties can be waived from work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents. The ability to waive counties is now based on federally determined Labor Market Areas and on economic factors like excess labor and high unemployment. The new rule lowers the threshold for unemployment rates those areas must meet to qualify for a waiver and removes state flexibility to determine which counties should be waived, despite states being better positioned to determine the economic environment in the local economies. This rule change will jeopardize access to SNAP for more than 92,000 people, many of whom struggle with mental health, substance use disorder, and other long-term conditions that would be worsened by chronic hunger.

The Wolf Administration is committed to increasing employment opportunities for all Pennsylvanians. Work requirements, however, are a blunt instrument that do not get a person a job and do not address the social, educational, medical, and environmental barriers that keep people in a cycle of poverty.

The Trump Administration in July announced a proposal to eliminate BBCE for SNAP. BBCE is a policy that gives states, including Pennsylvania, the flexibility to determine appropriate income thresholds and extend SNAP benefits to low-income families and individuals who would otherwise struggle to afford food. With BBCE, a Pennsylvania family of four is eligible for SNAP if they earn no more than about \$40,000 a year. If BBCE is eliminated, that family of four's SNAP eligibility limit will drop from about \$40,000 a year to no more than \$32,000 a year. For elderly single-person households, the limit would change from approximately \$24,000 a year to about \$15,000.

Eliminating BBCE also impacts the ability for low-income children to receive free and reduced-price school lunches. Families whose children are eligible for SNAP receive direct certification for eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches. If fewer families qualify for SNAP, those children will not receive direct certification. Additionally, in districts where 40 percent or more children receive free and reduced-price lunches, the school qualifies for the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools and school districts in low-income areas to provide free school lunches to the entire school. Reduction in the number of children receiving direct certification may mean entire districts lose their ability to provide free meals for all students.

And in October, the Trump Administration announced a proposal to alter the method Pennsylvania uses to determine the Heating/Cooling SUA for SNAP recipients, which could negatively affect approximately 775,000 households in Pennsylvania. When DHS determines that a household is eligible for SNAP, to determine the value of the grant they will receive, the SUA is used as a factor; acknowledging that money needed to pay for shelter and utilities is not available to be used to purchase food. The Trump Administration's rule would use a standard formula to determine each state's SUA for the entire country, ignoring costs of living and utility rates that vary from state to state. The proposed rule impacts the Northeast states more significantly than the rest of the country due to the information used in the calculation. In Pennsylvania, each reduction in the SUA of \$10 equates to a \$2 to \$3 reduction in SNAP benefits. If the Heating and Cooling SUA was reduced by \$200, for example, most households would see a reduction in SNAP benefits of \$40 to \$60 per month.

"Every one of these rule changes hurts vulnerable people in Pennsylvania around the country. Food is a necessity, and ripping this basic need away will only make it more difficult for people to meet their basic needs, work to get ahead, and achieve a better life without public assistance," said Secretary Miller. "If we truly want to reduce the shared cost of public assistance, we must invest in people and give them the ability to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, and this means supporting programs like SNAP."

In addition to SNAP helping 1.7 million Pennsylvanians avoid chronic hunger, SNAP helps local economies. More than 10,000 authorized retailers participate in SNAP across Pennsylvania, and these retailers redeemed about \$2.6 billion in SNAP benefits in 2018 according to the USDA.

In May 2019, the USDA published [a study](#) on the influence of SNAP redemptions on the economy and county-level employment in the time leading up to, during, and after the Great

Recession. This study found that SNAP redemptions could have a greater economic stimulus impact than many other forms of government spending per dollar spent, especially during a recession, because they are paid directly to low-income individuals. For instance, the grocery subsidies deliver food directly to tables along with a financial return into rural supermarkets and small businesses in those communities.

For more information on SNAP, visit www.dhs.pa.gov.

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