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United Way of Pennsylvania
www.uwp.org

Key Messages on SNAP for United Way Advocacy

Goals of United Way of Pennsylvania and our network:

- **Protect and strengthen SNAP** to maintain its responsiveness to combat hunger and provide financial stability.
- **Ensure policies promote access** and facilitate enrollment rather than create roadblocks.

Basic Background:

- All of the funding for SNAP comes from the federal government.
- SNAP must be used to purchase groceries. It cannot be used to buy alcohol, cigarettes, nonfoods, hot food or medicine.
- SNAP is authorized through the nutrition title of the Farm Bill, and the nutrition title constitutes about 80 percent of the Farm Bill budget.
- The current Farm Bill will expire on September 30. Congress can either extend the current Farm Bill, or reauthorize a new Farm Bill, but action needs to be taken by September 30.

SNAP supports work. 74% of SNAP families in Pennsylvania have at least one working adult. For families working long days and earning low-wages, SNAP helps stretch their budget to provide the basics. SNAP also helps workers who have fallen on tough times, through no fault of their own, to get by in-between work. When you can put food on the table, you can get back on your feet more quickly.

SNAP supports the economy. SNAP enrollment is counter-cyclical, expanding when the economy weakens and contracting when the economy recovers, making it one of our country's most responsive programs in stabilizing families. Moody's Analytics estimates that every \$1 increase in household SNAP generates about \$1.70 in economic activity. And each \$1 billion cut in SNAP eliminates 13,718 jobs in grocery and other food-related industries where jobs are held in high proportions by individuals under the age of 25. In Pennsylvania, there are over 10,000 authorized retailers participating in SNAP.

SNAP reduces poverty. A total of 73 percent of SNAP participants are from households at or below the federal poverty level. Between 2009 and 2012, SNAP kept an average of 342,000 people out of poverty in Pennsylvania, including 138,000 children. Pennsylvanians received more than \$2.67 billion in SNAP benefits in 2017.

SNAP is efficient. Even though the food assistance SNAP provides is modest—averaging only about \$1.40 per person per meal—it's a lifesaver for many Americans. In addition, SNAP has one of the most rigorous systems to determine eligibility upfront. As a result, SNAP has an impressive accuracy rate with more than 96% of SNAP benefits issued correctly to eligible households.

SNAP is temporary. More than 80% of SNAP participants are working in the year before or after getting SNAP, suggesting that SNAP is temporarily helping workers stay afloat when they hit hard times.

SNAP supports some of our most vulnerable populations – kids, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. About 2 of every 5 households on SNAP across the country include children. In Pennsylvania, just shy of 700,000 of the 1.8 million people on SNAP are children. About 185,000 of PA's SNAP beneficiaries are seniors. Seniors who are enrolled in SNAP have better health, less acute and long term care, and have lower Medicare/Medicaid costs in comparison with seniors who do not have SNAP. About 688,000 of Pennsylvania's SNAP participants are people with disabilities, and remaining 17,000 are able-bodied adults without dependents who are subject to SNAP work requirements.

SNAP helps people from all PA communities, not just urban communities. On average in Pennsylvania, SNAP reaches 944,462 households (1.85 million individuals) per month. These SNAP beneficiaries represent 15% of families in the commonwealth. SNAP helps 1 of 8 rural and metro households and 1 of 7 small town households afford healthy, nutritious meals. These fall just shy of the national averages (13% metro, 15% small towns, 16% rural).

How to talk about United Way's concerns with the failed House Farm Bill

Work requirements

- United Way supports the importance and value of work that sustains families and communities.
- United Way supports encouraging and promoting work, financial stability, and self-sufficiency. But work requirement proposals could negatively impact individuals and families already struggling to make ends meet.
- For individuals who aren't working, the situation is often much more complex than simply finding a job opening. Some candidates need training for skills sought by employers, lack of access to transportation, costs of childcare or disabilities and/or chronic, recurring medical conditions.
- Getting people to work requires more systemic changes which address the high cost and lack of access to child care, workforce development and skills training, among others.
- The administrative processes behind work requirements are costly to implement and represent an unfunded mandate which will cost more state taxpayer dollars. The cost-benefit does not work out to the benefit of the taxpayer, because work requirements on their own are not sufficient to promote employment and potentially create obstacles to meeting basic needs.

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- To better serve the needs of low income individuals and families struggling to make ends meet, our focus should be on addressing the barriers to employment they face; creating better economic opportunities, workforce development, skills training, and addressing the high costs of housing and quality childcare.

Protect state flexibility

- “Broad based categorical eligibility” is a popular option that lets states increase administrative efficiencies and reduce unnecessary red tape when determining who qualifies for SNAP. Forty-two states, with leadership from both sides of the aisle, have taken this option.
- By maintaining current law, states will continue to have the flexibility to adjust income cutoffs and asset limits, so working families don’t abruptly lose SNAP when they earn or save slightly more.
- Proposals to restrict or eliminate categorical eligibility would create a cliff that punishes families who are trying to do all the right things: work more hours, get a better-paying job, or save more money so that an unexpected bill or illness doesn’t push them under water.

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