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Hunger for Justice — Protecting Children and Families from Severe SNAP (Food Stamp) Cuts

“Hunger is not a problem. It is an obscenity. How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

— Anne Frank

One of America’s enduring qualities is our civic ethic to rally and support one another in times of trouble. In much of the twentieth century, images we see today of starving children in sub-Saharan Africa could be seen in many parts of the America. Out of this epidemic came the Food Stamp Program. While one can trace food stamp’s roots all the way back to the Great Depression, it did not become the program we see today until the 1970s. Since then, food stamps have all but eliminated *extreme* hunger in the U.S.

The Food Stamp Program, renamed the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP) in 2008, is still the first line of defense against hunger in the U.S. With 47 million Americans, nearly half of them children (22 million), currently receiving SNAP, it is literally putting food on the table low-income families across America.

Unfortunately, SNAP has been targeted for major cuts in Congress, particularly in the House of Representatives. On September 19, the House passed H.R.3102, which would cut SNAP by \$39 billion over the next ten years. As a result, [the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\) estimates](#) that 3.8 million people would lose SNAP benefits in 2014 alone. Here are the specific impacts of the House bill:

- 2.1 million people, mostly working families and children, would lose SNAP benefits. ([CBO](#))
- When their families lose SNAP eligibility, 210,000 low-income children would also lose access to free meals at school. ([CBO](#))
- 1.7 million additional adults would lose SNAP through an elimination of waivers for unemployed workers without children. Currently, able-bodied adults without dependents may only receive SNAP for three months out of every three years. In times of high unemployment, states can currently request a waiver of this restriction. ([CBO](#)) The new House legislation would kill these waivers and force governors to turn a blind eye to the parts of their state going through particularly tough economic times.
- The House bill would also give states the option to impose work requirements on all SNAP recipients who can theoretically work, regardless of their ability to find work. The House bill provides no new funding for job placement or training. Parents with children as young as one who cannot find work or are unable to find safe and affordable child care for their young could lose access to SNAP at a time when only one out of six low-income families eligible for child care assistance are able to receive it. States adopting this requirement would have an added incentive to kick millions off the program without adequate work supports – they get to keep half of the savings generated from removing people from SNAP. States that do not would see their existing federal SNAP funds for job training cut off. ([Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#))

Even at a time when many people are fed up with what is coming out of the U.S. Congress, these draconian cuts are a new low. Especially in times of economic hard times, we must provide our children and families with a basic level of nutrition. Moreover, SNAP is one of the most effective programs out there. Here are the facts.

- **SNAP works.** According to the U.S. Census, SNAP lifted [4 million people out of poverty in 2012](#).
- **No other program serves the poor as comprehensively as SNAP.** [91 percent of SNAP benefits go to households with incomes below the poverty line](#) (\$23,550 a year for a family of four in 2012). Two of every five SNAP households have gross incomes below *half* of the poverty line.
- **SNAP benefits are extremely modest.** SNAP benefits average about \$1.48 per person per meal (this will [drop to less than \\$1.40](#) per person per meal in November 2013). Because these levels are low and food prices have increased, the average family exhausts nearly [90 percent of their SNAP benefits by the third week of the month](#).
- **SNAP is efficient.** SNAP boasts an accuracy rate [above 96 percent](#) and [fraud rate of only 1.3 percent](#).
- **The cost of SNAP benefits will abate as the economy recovers.** SNAP costs have risen substantially in the last few years largely in response to the severe economic recession and weak recovery. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that by 2019, [SNAP expenditures will fall back to their 1995 level](#) as a share of the economy.

SNAP Helps Families in Times of Need

I was 8 years old when I watched my father walk out on our family. Being that young, I did not understand the impact it would have on our daily lives. Our household went from a family of 6 supported by dual incomes to a family of 5 supported by one and that one salary was not making ends meet. After making a career change and securing a second job, there still was not enough money to put food on the table. Rather than watch her children suffer, my mother swallowed her pride, loaded us kids in the car and stood on line to apply for assistance. She was granted food stamps, "government cheese" and my siblings and I were enrolled in the National School Lunch program, where we received free school lunches. Had it not been for these programs there would have been many days and nights that my siblings and I would have went hungry; instead we were given a chance at a normal childhood by receiving these benefits. Not having to worry about where our next meal was coming from, freed up time for each of us to get an education, some of us excelled at sports, some of excelled at the arts, but each of us made it out of childhood to become young professionals within our community. Furthermore, each of us made it out of childhood with a similar goal, to never forget where we came from and to help those that have the unfortunate luck of being where we once were. Eventually my mother got back on her feet and was able to leave the program with her head held high, knowing her kids were always well fed, thanks to SNAP.

– Michelle

(highlighted at:

<http://www.nokidhungry.org/snap/your-snap-stories>)

The changes proposed by Congress are not about combatting fraud, eliminating waste, or getting people back to work. They are intended to kick people off SNAP, plain and simple. As a country, we cannot afford these cuts. [Feeding America estimates](#) that the America's food banks would have to *double* the number of meals served to make up for the SNAP cuts in H.R. 3012 and the automatic benefit cut beginning on November 1. Every day, SNAP is a symbol to all Americans that says "we take care of our own." We are stronger as a people and a nation because of programs like SNAP. To abandon those values now would dramatically increase poverty, hurt our economic recovery, and send a terrible message to millions of low-income children and families that their country no longer cares.