

Proposed SNAP Work Requirements and Children's Food Security

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The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest nutrition assistance program, helping approximately 40 million low-income families put food on the table each month. Legislation proposed as part of the 2018 farm bill reauthorization would expand and intensify work requirements for some working-age adults. It would also remove benefits for 12 months or longer for those who do not comply with the requirements or obtain an exemption. Although the legislation exempts adults caring for children younger than 6, adults caring for children ages 6 to 17 would be required to work or participate in employment and training activities for at least 20 hours per week.

These proposed changes could limit families' access to SNAP benefits if parents or caregivers struggle to find a job or work enough hours to meet the new requirements. Many low-wage jobs in today's economy are temporary and involve unpredictable, fluctuating schedules, which may make it difficult for some parents to consistently work the required number of hours proposed in the bill.¹

Using Urban's ATTIS microsimulation model, we estimate² the following:

- Roughly 2.7 million SNAP households with children have adults who would be subject to the new work requirements.
- Roughly 1.9 million of these households,³ or 69 percent, have adults who are not working enough to meet the requirements in at least one month of the year, even though more than half are working enough in at least one other month of the year.
- In all 50 states, many households with children could lose access to SNAP benefits if the proposed legislation were in effect today. States vary in the number of households with children and adults who would not consistently meet the monthly requirement. In Delaware, 47 percent of households with children have adults who would meet the requirement in one month but not in another. But in Wisconsin, 77 percent of households with children have adults who would meet the requirement in one month but not in another. For a detailed state-by-state breakdown, see the attached table. We provide upper-bound estimates because we lack information on who will ultimately receive exemptions. For an explanation of our methodology, go to <https://urban.is/2K46YmP>.

SNAP Reduces Child Food Insecurity and Poverty

Research has shown that SNAP has a positive impact on food insecurity⁴ and that having access to food assistance in childhood may improve long-term outcomes.⁵

A recent analysis examined long-term outcomes among children who lived in areas where food stamps were phased in between 1961 and 1975. Children who had early access to food stamps⁶ had lower rates of obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes as adults, compared with children who did not receive nutrition assistance. And women in that study had improved economic outcomes, including increases in employment, income, educational attainment, and reduced program participation as adults.

SNAP is also an effective antipoverty tool. Using the supplemental poverty measure, Urban researchers found that SNAP removed 3.8 million children from poverty and lowered the child poverty rate by 28 percent in 2015.⁷

Consequences of Food Insecurity for Children

The risks for children who are food insecure can be significant.⁸ Food-insecure children and youth may be more likely to suffer from anemia, worse overall health, and chronic health conditions such as asthma.⁹ Food-insecure adolescents have been shown to be at higher risk¹⁰ for anxiety, depression, substance abuse and other mental health disorders.¹¹ Food insecurity can have serious short- and long-term consequences, so any policy proposals around this issue must be evaluated carefully.

¹ Susan J. Lambert, Peter J. Fugiel, and Julia R. Henly, “[Schedule Unpredictability among Early Career Workers in the US Labor Market: A National Snapshot](#)” (Chicago: University of Chicago Employment, Instability, Family Well-being, and Social Policy Network, 2014).

² Gregory Acs, Laura Wheaton, and Elaine Waxman, “[Assessing Changes to SNAP Work Requirements in the 2018 Farm Bill: Proposal as Passed by the House Committee on Agriculture](#)” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2018).

³ Here the term “household” refers to all individuals in a single SNAP case or “assistance unit.”

⁴ Brent Kreider, John V. Pepper, Craig Gundersen, and Dean Jolliffe, “[Identifying the Effects of SNAP \(Food Stamps\) on Child Health Outcomes When Participation Is Endogenous and Misreported](#),” *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 107, no. 499 (2012): 958–75.

⁵ Craig Gundersen and James P. Ziliak, “[Childhood Food Insecurity in the US: Trends, Causes, and Policy Options](#),” *Future of Children* 24, no. 2 (2014).

⁶ Hilary Hoynes, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, and Douglas Almond, “[Long-Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net](#),” *American Economic Review* 106, no. 4 (April 2016): 903–34. This study leverages insights from the phased introduction of the Food Stamp Program, which was rolled out across counties between 1961 and 1975, and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics to link data on family background and county of residence in early childhood to adult health and economic outcomes.

⁷ Laura Wheaton and Victoria Tran, “[The Antipoverty Effects of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2018).

⁸ John T. Cook, Deborah A. Frank, Suzette M. Levenson, Nicole B. Neault, Tim C. Heeren, Maurine M. Black, Carol Berkowitz, et al., “[Child Food Insecurity Increases Risks Posed by Household Food Insecurity to Young Children's Health](#),” *Journal of Nutrition* 136, no. 4 (2006): 1073–76.

⁹ Sharon I. Kirkpatrick, Lynn McIntyre, and Melissa L. Potestio, “[Child Hunger and Long-Term Adverse Consequences for Health](#),” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 164, no. 8 (August 2010): 754–62.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Poole-Di Salvo, Ellen J. Silver, and Ruth E. K. Stein, “[Household Food Insecurity and Mental Health Problems among Adolescents: What Do Parents Report?](#),” *Academic Pediatrics* 16, no. 1 (2016): 90–96.

¹¹ Katie A. McLaughlin, Jennifer Greif Green, Margarita Alegría, E. Jane Costello, Michael J. Gruber, Nancy A. Sampson, and Ronald C. Kessler, “[Food Insecurity and Mental Disorders in a National Sample of US Adolescents](#),” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 51, no. 12 (2012): 1293–1303.

Households with Children Participating in SNAP, by State

Monthly average, in thousands

State	Total SNAP households with children	Number of households with at least one participant subject to work requirement	Number of households with at least one participant subject to work requirement and not meeting it	Share of households subject to work requirement that are not meeting it (%)	Share of households that did not meet the work requirement in one month but met it in another month ^a (%)
Alabama	171	66	39	58	53
Alaska	16	6	4	58	63
Arizona	172	54	33	62	54
Arkansas	96	32	17	53	68
California	966	262	171	65	56
Colorado	105	33	18	54	69
Connecticut	63	23	14	61	65
Delaware	25	12	6	51	47
DC	17	6	3	42	67
Florida	566	196	108	55	61
Georgia	327	114	61	53	57
Hawaii	23	9	5	53	55
Idaho	41	15	8	55	67
Illinois	327	107	61	57	59
Indiana	155	56	33	59	56
Iowa	72	28	16	55	65
Kansas	55	20	9	47	67
Kentucky	139	48	27	56	63
Louisiana	175	64	37	57	55
Maine	26	10	6	56	54
Maryland	120	38	22	59	57
Massachusetts	121	46	27	58	63
Michigan	254	97	54	56	63
Minnesota	91	25	13	50	72
Mississippi	122	46	24	53	54
Missouri	159	57	32	56	65
Montana	22	7	5	65	59
Nebraska	42	12	6	47	73
Nevada	79	24	16	65	55
New Hampshire	16	6	4	55	72
New Jersey	164	56	34	61	59
New Mexico	79	25	14	55	55
New York	504	175	101	57	55
North Carolina	283	101	57	57	55
North Dakota	11	2	1	46	91
Ohio	321	108	57	53	66
Oklahoma	125	42	27	64	56
Oregon	105	32	19	61	60
Pennsylvania	295	101	61	61	62
Rhode Island	25	7	4	56	72
South Carolina	145	53	33	61	62
South Dakota	20	7	4	59	63
Tennessee	208	74	42	57	60
Texas	825	247	141	57	63
Utah	49	15	8	57	72
Vermont	10	4	3	74	69
Virginia	176	60	35	58	57
Washington	154	48	31	65	59
West Virginia	57	21	13	62	64
Wisconsin	117	43	21	49	77
Wyoming	8	3	2	61	89
Total	8,245	2,745	1,584	58	60

Source: Gregory Acs, Laura Wheaton, and Elaine Waxman, “Assessing Changes to SNAP Work Requirements in the 2018 Farm Bill: Proposal as Passed by the House Committee on Agriculture” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2018).

Notes: Work requirement is as proposed in the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018, H.R. 2, 115th Cong. (2018), as passed by the House Committee on Agriculture. “Household” refers to all individuals in a single SNAP case or “assistance unit.”

^a The household does not need to be receiving SNAP in the month that a member works enough to meet the work requirement.