



ADVOCACY IN ACTION

CHARACTER PACKET

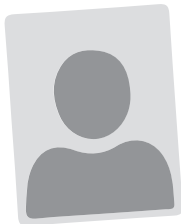
CONSERVATIVE POLICY CENTER ANALYST

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MAZON

A Jewish Response
To Hunger



CONSERVATIVE POLICY CENTER ANALYST



BACKGROUND

You represent the leading conservative think tank in Calissouri. You do state level research and advocacy to forward a staunchly conservative agenda on a variety of issues including tax policy, regulations, business, and the social safety net. You are well respected by the conservative community and have the ear of influential individuals who share your political views.



POSITION ON THE BILL

You do not support the bill in its current form, but you believe you can use the bill as an opportunity to reform SNAP in your state.

- You will fight against Amendment 1.
- You prefer Amendment 2, but it is not enough to make you support the bill.
- You are fighting for Amendment 3.



RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ACTORS

- You have positive relationships Senator B and C, who generally trust your opinion. Senator A will not listen to you because they believe you have a strong conservative bias.
- You have a friendly relationship with the Chamber of Commerce because much of your research and policy recommendations are good for businesses.



ADDITIONAL GOALS

- You want to convince Senator B and C to believe that the changes you are advocating for will strengthen SNAP. Senator B, in particular, is on the fence and worried that SNAP (1) wastes money, (2) creates dependency, and (3) hurts business and the economy, and so you want to do your part to convince him of these things.
- Try to get other people push for Amendment 3 when meeting with Senators.



STATE OF CALISSOURI SENATE

Eighty-Ninth Session

S.B. No. 47

TITLE OF BILL:

Healthy Eating, Here at Home

BE IT ENACTED BY LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF CALISSOURI

1 SECTION 1: BILL DETAILS

2

3 SNAP recipients are able to receive dollar for dollar matching vouchers for SNAP
4 benefits they spend at farmers markets, up to \$10 per week. There is no cap on the
5 number of vouchers farmers markets may give out.

6

7 Farmers market EBT booths will have tokens that SNAP recipients may exchange for
8 EBT dollars.

9

10 Farmers markets will keep logs of how many people use the tokens, and will apply for
11 reimbursement at the end of each month. They may also apply for grants to advertise the
12 voucher program and to pay for the extra administrative cost of running the program.

13

14 Only people already on SNAP can participate in this program.

15

16 The program will be run by End Hunger Now, who will be responsible for administration,
17 outreach, and evaluation.

18

19

20

21 SECTION 2: FUNDING

22

23 The program will receive annual funding of \$500,000 from the Calissouri's budget. This
24 funding goes to a non-profit (End Hunger Now), who will run the program. The money
25 may be spent on:

- 26 ▪ Directly reimbursing farmers markets for vouchers.
- 27 ▪ Advertising/outreach and administration (additional staffing, bookkeeping, etc.)
- 28 grants.

29

30 The money may NOT be spent on:

- 31 ▪ Helping farmers markets to set up booths that except EBT cards (credit cards on
- 32 which SNAP money is loaded).
- 33 ▪ Administration of farmers market EBT booths not directly related to the vouchers
- 34 program.

35

36 The funding is guaranteed for two years, after which End Hunger Now and the State
37 legislature will evaluate the program and determine if it is successful and worth
38 continuing to fund.

39

40 SECTION 3: POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS

41

42 *Amendment 1:* Double the yearly funding, and raise the voucher amount to \$25 / week.

43

44 *Amendment 2:* Instead of a set \$500,000 yearly sum, pay for the bill through 5% sales tax
45 increase (which is calculated by the Calissouri State Budget Office to yield about the
46 same amount of revenue).

47

48 *Amendment 3:* Reinstate work requirements: Unemployed adults without children may
49 only stay on SNAP for 3 months at a time unless they find work.

SNAP BACKGROUNDER

WHAT IS SNAP?

The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (SNAP), formerly known food stamps, is a government program that helps low income Americans to purchase healthy food. SNAP recipients receive a monthly stipend loaded onto an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which looks like a credit card and can be used at most grocery stores as well as some convenience stores and farmers markets.

SNAP is a federal program, but it is run by states. It is an entitlement program, meaning that any household that is eligible for the program is entitled to receive benefits, and states are not allowed to turn anybody away because they run out of money. Anybody who meets the eligibility requirements is able to access SNAP.

SNAP participants do not fit one single profile, but many of the people who benefit from SNAP are

- Working part-time or low wage jobs
- Unemployed
- Receiving welfare or other public assistance
- Elderly or disabled
- homeless

The size of the benefit depends on each family's income as well as other factors. In 2016 the average monthly benefit for a family of four was \$471, which translates to \$1.31 per meal per person. SNAP benefits are meant to supplement, rather than replace families' meal budgets.



ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility requirements vary by state, but in general households below 130% the federal poverty line (\$31,980 per year for a family of four in 2016) are eligible to receive SNAP based on their income. Certain expenses, such as childcare payments and medical expenses, are subtracted when

determining income. Households must also pass a resource test, meaning that the value of their eligible assets must be below a certain amount, which in most states is around \$2250, or \$3250 for households with a disabled or elderly family member. Home lot values, SSI and TANF (cash based government assistance programs) benefits, and most pension plans do not count as eligible assets.

Certain SNAP users must comply with work requirements in order to continue to receive benefits. Childless, able-bodied adults who are able to work receive SNAP for a maximum of 3 months in a 36 month period unless they (1) are working at least 20 hours a week, (2) are at least a half-time student, or (3) are enrolled in a job training program. During the Great Recession, when unemployment was high, many states obtained waivers to get rid of the work requirement. In recent years many of those states are deciding to reinstate work requirements.



Are SNAP benefits really too low?

Angela Rachidi

January 20, 2016 9:55 am | *The Hill*

Benefits are too low. At least, that's the narrative circulating in Washington when it comes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—formerly known as Food Stamps. A new [report](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/SNAP_report_final_nonembargo.pdf) (https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/SNAP_report_final_nonembargo.pdf) from the President's Council of Economic Advisers at the White House incorrectly argues as much, and suggests that benefits should be increased. But before acting on this recommendation, Congress might want to take a closer look at the data that show that SNAP eliminates hunger for the overwhelming majority of American children, and leaves most recipient households with adequate food. Congress should reform SNAP, but a costly benefit increase is not the right answer.



(https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SNAP_benefits_too_low_grocery_children_food_stamps_2020_500x293.jpg)

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According to a US Department of Agriculture [survey](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err194.aspx) (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err194.aspx>) on food security, only 1.1 percent of American households with children had a child who experienced hunger in 2014. Yet, the CEA report mistakenly claims that “the current level of [SNAP] benefits often cannot sustain families through the end of the month—causing children to go hungry and endangering their health, educational performance, and life chances.” Little evidence suggests that low SNAP benefits contribute to child hunger. In fact, SNAP is a major reason child hunger is not a larger problem.

The CEA's claim that SNAP cannot sustain families through the end of the month also overstates the evidence. It is true that food purchases for SNAP households have been found to decline over the course of the month. But researchers Justine Hastings and Ebonya Washington suggest in their 2010 *American Economic Journal* [article](https://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/pol.2.2.142) (<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/pol.2.2.142>) that this is due to “short-term impatience.” In other words, households respond to a large influx of cash-equivalent at the beginning of the month by spending it up-front. The authors recommend solving this problem by giving out SNAP benefits more frequently.

A [study](http://aepp.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2014/11/26/aepp.ppu039.full.pdf+html) (<http://aepp.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2014/11/26/aepp.ppu039.full.pdf+html>) by Jessica Todd published in 2014 in *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* found that a temporary increase in SNAP benefits resulting from the 2009 stimulus package increased SNAP spending later in the month. It's been suggested that this means that SNAP benefit levels were too low prior to the increase. It's possible. But it is also possible that households responded to an increase in benefits by spending more, which still doesn't tell us much about the adequacy of SNAP benefits.

The CEA report's statement that “a majority of SNAP households still reported experiencing low or very low food security in 2014” also misrepresents SNAP. Low food security (meaning an adequate, nutritious diet is not provided) could have easily occurred *before* the household started receiving SNAP benefits. Examining food security data while households were participating in the program, reveals that [66.5 percent](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1896824/ap069.pdf) (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1896824/ap069.pdf>) were in fact *food secure*.

Another way to assess SNAP adequacy is to compare benefit levels to the cost of food in the thrifty food plan (USDA's assessment of an adequate diet that is used to set SNAP benefit levels). A recent [study](https://appam.confex.com/appam/2015/webprogram/Paper13245.html) (<https://appam.confex.com/appam/2015/webprogram/Paper13245.html>) found “that for roughly 30 percent of households, the average cost of the [thrifty food plan] exceeds the maximum SNAP benefit.” This means that 70 percent of SNAP households

receive sufficient benefits to provide a diet determined adequate by USDA, which provides further evidence that SNAP is sufficient for most households.

All of this is to suggest that costly across-the-board increases in SNAP benefit levels are not needed. According to the [Congressional Budget Office](https://www.cbo.gov/publication/43175) (<https://www.cbo.gov/publication/43175>) (CBO), the SNAP increase in the 2009 stimulus cost approximately \$8.4 billion per year (accounting for about one-fifth of the growth in SNAP expenditures from 2009 to 2011). A 3 percent benefit increase, per the CBO, would cost an additional \$2.3 billion per year.

A less costly option may be to provide different benefit levels based on local food costs, as has been suggested in a 2013 Institute of Medicine [report](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK206903/) (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK206903/>). Allowing for larger housing cost deductions when calculating SNAP amounts should also be considered. This would increase SNAP amounts for those living in high housing costs areas, such as New York City, Boston, and Washington, D.C. Both would better target those most at risk of being 'food insecure,' without raising benefit levels for many of those who do not need it.

Pilot programs to test these theories are also worth considering, as was recommended in a new [report](http://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/hungercommission/20151216222324/https://hungercommission.rti.org/Portals/0/SiteHtml/Act) (<http://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/hungercommission/20151216222324/https://hungercommission.rti.org/Portals/0/SiteHtml/Act>) from the National Commission on Hunger. And more research is definitely needed on the relationship between SNAP and hunger, especially among children. Adding a question to the USDA's food security survey to better assess whether households were receiving SNAP at the time of the reported incidence of hunger would be a good first step.

SNAP has been [described](http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=24621) (<http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=24621>) as "one of the most effective antipoverty programs in the safety net." If this is to remain true, we need an open and transparent dialogue about what the data really show. Large-scale policy changes based on false impressions are not the answer.

Rachidi is a research fellow in poverty studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Previously, she served as deputy commissioner for policy research and evaluation for the Department of Social Services in New York City.

This article was found online at:

<https://www.aei.org/publication/are-snap-benefits-really-too-low/>



Work rules benefit many SNAP recipients

Angela Rachidi

March 15, 2016 2:02 pm | *AEIdeas*

Over the past several months, the reinstatement (or pending reinstatement) of work requirements in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – formerly the Food Stamp Program – has been characterized as harsh. According to some, the federal government is going to [cut thousands of the nation's poor people](http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-than-500000-adults-will-lose-snap-benefits-in-2016-as-waivers-expire) (<http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-than-500000-adults-will-lose-snap-benefits-in-2016-as-waivers-expire>) from SNAP and [squeeze food-stamp recipients](https://newrepublic.com/article/120772/republicans-reinstate-work-requirements-food-stamps-snap) (<https://newrepublic.com/article/120772/republicans-reinstate-work-requirements-food-stamps-snap>) with federal work requirements. While these headlines may grab attention, they mislead and hide the potential benefits of work requirements.

SNAP work rules have been around since 1996, when Congress passed welfare reform. According to the law, adults who are capable of work and have no dependent children (called ABAWDs) can only receive SNAP benefits in 3 out of every 36 months unless working or participating in an approved work activity for at least 20 hours per week. But the law allows the federal government to waive this requirement when jobs are hard to find, evidenced by high unemployment.



(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/twenty20_912266ce-22ba-4bdd-b7ef-b8880ab2a308_work-e1458064625810.jpg)

Twenty20.

Many states took advantage of these waivers during the Great Recession, but once the economy improved, some states elected to end their waivers (for example, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Maine). Now with low unemployment, many states have no choice but to reinstate the work rules. [Currently](#)

(<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/FY%202016-Quarter-2-ABAWD-Waiver-Status.pdf>), 15 states have SNAP work requirements for ABAWDs statewide and another 28 have reinstated them in parts of their state. This leaves only 7 states and 3 territories with no SNAP work requirement at all.

Although often portrayed as severe, the SNAP work requirements serve an important purpose. Most ABAWDs receiving SNAP do not work (83.1% according to the most recent [data](#) (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2014.pdf>), Table A.16), or at least do not report work to the SNAP agency. This is mainly because working often puts their income above the eligibility threshold — a full-time job at \$9 per hour would make a one-person household ineligible for SNAP.

But SNAP recipients may also not work because getting assistance from the government makes it easier. It is hard to measure precisely the extent to which SNAP disincentivizes work, but [research](#)

Work requirements can bring unreported employment to the attention of the agency, and can encourage

people who
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start.

(<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/publications/441059376551ec428c2efd.pdf>) suggests that the introduction of the Food Stamp Program in the late 1960s reduced work, and economist Casey Mulligan from the University of Chicago [argues](http://www.policyuncertainty.com/app/Mulligan-Testimony.pdf) (<http://www.policyuncertainty.com/app/Mulligan-Testimony.pdf>) that public benefits, like SNAP, allow unemployed people to avoid looking for work.

A [new report](http://thefga.org/download/PowerOfWork-KansasWelfareReform.pdf) (<http://thefga.org/download/PowerOfWork-KansasWelfareReform.pdf>) by the Foundation for Government Accountability (FGA) supports these arguments. Work rules were reinstated in Kansas for ABAWDs in late 2013 and 6 subsequent quarters of wage reporting data from the Department of Labor were tracked for those subject to the work rules. According to the report, the share of ABAWDs receiving SNAP who worked at least 20 hours per month doubled in the first quarter after the work rules were reinstated, from 13% to 31%.

Among those who left SNAP (almost 50% left within 3 months of the work rule reinstatement), the employment rate was 39% in the first quarter after the rules were reinstated and 6 quarters later 64% had worked at some point. Without a comparison group, it's hard to know precisely whether the work requirements caused the increased employment, but the dramatic change in employment is hard to ignore.

In correspondence with the researcher, he explained that some of the employment discovered after the individual left SNAP was employment that existed prior to the work rules but went undiscovered by the agency. But much of it was new, suggesting that the work rules provided an incentive for individuals to seek out a job.

But what about those who were not working after leaving SNAP? Kansas offered an employment and training program to ABAWDs who were approaching the time limit (which would have extended their SNAP benefits if they participated), although services were not guaranteed. Apparently data are still being collected on the utilization of these services, but the researcher indicated that few (possibly less than 400) took advantage of them. It's possible that they were working in jobs not picked up by the wage data ("off-the-books" work) or they had access to other resources. Ultimately, it's unclear why many able-bodied adults would not take advantage of education and training in exchange for SNAP benefits.

The experience of Kansas shows that the ABAWD work rules can benefit many low-income adults who are capable of work, but don't work while receiving SNAP. Work requirements can bring unreported employment to the attention of the agency, and can encourage people who are not working to start. Concern about those who are not working after leaving SNAP deserves attention, but eliminating the work rules altogether is not the answer.

Learn more: [It's time to reinstate the SNAP work requirements](http://www.aei.org/publication/its-time-to-reinstate-the-snap-work-requirements/)
(<http://www.aei.org/publication/its-time-to-reinstate-the-snap-work-requirements/>)

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/work-rules-benefit-many-snap-recipients/>

Seattle mayor swaps property tax for county sales tax to fund homeless programs

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BY MYNORTHWEST.COM

APRIL 4, 2017 AT 5:46 AM



A 46-year-old Kent man is suing Seattle Mayor Ed Murray over allegations of rape. (KIRO 7)

Seattle Mayor Ed Murray ended his pursuit of a city property tax for homeless funding in favor of a county-wide tax.

Related: [King County Exec touts new homeless shelter, treatment centers](#)

On Monday, Murray and King County Executive Dow Constantine announced a 0.1 percent regional sales tax increase that they will try to pass in 2018.

The county-wide tax will allow Seattle and King County to raise, “millions more,” Murray said.

“We know homelessness is an emergency not contained in Seattle,” Murray said. “The crisis is not bound by artificial borders.”

Related: [Devastating tax defeat for Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, homelessness](#)

Murray announced his original plan to raise more funding for homeless programs during his State of the City address in late February. His proposed property-tax levy would have raised [\\$275 million over five years](#). Murray planned to use the money to provide rental subsidies to get people off the streets, as well as expanding shelters and treatment services.

The mayor was hoping to get the levy on the [August ballot](#), which would have required more than 20,000 signatures.

The 0.1 percent sales tax increase is the second proposed by Constantine. Earlier this year he proposed a [\\$469 million tax hike](#) to raise money for art, science, and culture programs.

A 0.1 percent sales tax on every \$10 spent would raise \$67 million per year.

Homeless in King County

Washington homelessness rose by more than 7 percent last year, according to the Department of House and Urban Development. There were about 1,400 more people sleeping outside and in shelters. The increase is the second highest in the country, falling behind California, the Associated Press reported.

Homelessness has grown in the Seattle-King County area while it has reportedly dropped in Everett-Snohomish County, Tacoma-Pierce County, Spokane, Yakima, Vancouver-Clark County and the rest of Washington.

What Works Cities: [Seattle’s data-driven homeless pilot](#)

During last year’s homeless count, volunteers found the number of people living outside or in shelters increased by 19 percent over 2015. According to a KIRO

Radio staff report, the number of people living in unsheltered homes in Seattle and King County increased from 3,772 in 2015 to about 4,500 in 2016.

Constantine said requests for help from the federal government have failed.

“Clearly, we are on our own,” Constantine said. “We must find the solutions that work for our cities, for our entire region, and we must find those solutions together.”