ADVOCACY IN ACTION

CHARACTER PACKET

REPORTER

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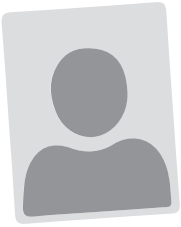
MAZON | A Jewish Response To Hunger



REPORTER

BACKGROUND

You are a political reporter for the Callisouri Star Tribune, and you've been asked to write a two-paragraph story about this bill. Your editor / boss also wants the article to give some background on SNAP in general.

You have covered social interest and political stories in the past, but you've never written about SNAP in particular. You know, in general, how food stamps work but don't know much specifically about SNAP or about this bill.

POSITION ON THE BILL

Neutral

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ACTORS

- N/A

ADDITIONAL GOALS

- You are trying to interview as many people as possible, capture all sides, and write a balanced story. Use the Newspaper Article Writing Guide and Example News Article to help you write your own article. If a protest occurs, you may write about that too.
- You will a chance to share your article at the end of the activity, while the senators are voting.

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

SECTION 1: BILL DETAILS

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

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

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

Only people already on SNAP can participate in this program.

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

SECTION 2: FUNDING

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

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

The money may NOT be spent on:

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

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

SECTION 3: POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS

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

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

Amendment 3: Reinstate work requirements: Unemployed adults without children may 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.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE WRITING GUIDE

News articles are designed to relate the news. The article is written to inform readers. It is factual, meant to present information in a quick, digestible form. The following elements of writing a newspaper article are important, so heed them well.

RESEARCH AND FACT GATHERING

Perhaps the #1 rule of writing a newspaper article is that you are factual. You do not want to make assumptions or fabricate information. Before you can write your article, you must have as many of the facts as you can gather. Here are some facts that you will need to find out:

- **What?** The specific event that took place.
- **Who?** The people involved.
- **Where?** Places.
- **When?** Date and time.
- **Why?** Reasons for the event taking place.
- **How?** Connecting the facts.

You will also need to gather as much detail as you can. This will involve:

- Interviewing people connected to the story.
- Gathering quotes from people (be exact...never paraphrase what they said). Cite names, unless they specifically request to remain anonymous.
- Resolving conflicting facts from individuals.
- Researching public information (always cite your sources, so write them down).

Once you have all your facts, you can begin to write your article.

THE HEADLINE OR TITLE

For a news article, this is where you have most of your creativity. The headline must grab the attention of the reader. It needs to be catchy, emotion evoking, or creates curiosity. Be creative with it. In many instances, you will spend more time trying to come up with the perfect headline than you will in the actual writing.

THE ARTICLE BODY

The main news article itself is written from bottom down. In other words, the most important information comes first and each paragraph gives less and less details. Whereas a novel, for example, starts you out with little information and you must read to the end to get all of it.

In news article writing, however, you want to provide the key information right up front. You start with the

6 questions you should have already answered in your research:

- **What?**
- **Who?**
- **Where?**
- **When?** Date and time.
- **Why?** Reasons for the event taking place.
- **How?** Connecting the facts.

Your first two paragraphs need to answer all these questions. For example:

> *The Varsity football team beat Smith High School last Saturday, 21 to 7, in a rematch that vindicated Coach John's prediction of a win during Friday's pep-rally. Our first home win this season at our very own Jane Doe Field was a morale booster to the entire student body. Quarterback, Joe Baker completed 18 out of 24 passes to cement the win.*

This was only a simple example, but almost all the questions are actually answered in the first two sentences. From here you can add more inconsequential details, such as receiving yards, rushing yards, and so forth. You will at some point include quotes from people such as the coach, the quarterback, a receiver, a fan in the stands, and perhaps the principal. Although for quotes, you don't want to include too many, but having two or three is important. By the time you get to the end of the article, you are simply expanding upon what the reader already knows from the first two paragraphs you wrote.

Don't make your paragraphs long—two to three sentences each.

U46 board rejects late breakfasts for students

By **Rafael Guerrero**
Elgin Courier-News

APRIL 25, 2017, 6:32 PM

Elgin-based District U46 schools will sidestep a new state program that requires some schools to provide late breakfasts to students, following a unanimous vote from board members amid debate over the district's role in providing for low-income students.

U46 School Board member Jeanette Ward said she voted to exempt the district from the state requirement because it is not funded. However, she also questioned whether it fits into the services the district should provide.

"It's not the job of the schools to provide breakfast," she said. "If you head down that road, where does it end? Soon we're going to be providing dinner, housing, clothing and what else. It's not the job of the schools to become parents."

Board members Traci O'Neal Ellis and Veronica Noland also opposed it because of the lack of funding, but disagreed with Ward's statement, saying feeding children should be a priority for schools when finances are sound.

"Even though we are getting this exemption, we need to be looking at how to serve those kids, especially those who get to school one minute before school starts," said Noland.

The state's breakfast after the bell mandate requires schools that have at least 70 percent low-income students to provide breakfast not just before school but after the morning bell rings in the school day. The breakfast-after-the-bell mandate goes into effect next school year.

School districts can get out of the mandate through a few options, including a school board vote.

The school board voted Monday for the exemption because U46 is attempting to quash any non-essential spending in light of a budget impasse that shows no signs of ending. U46 CEO Tony Sanders this week said next school year is in peril without a new state budget and confirmed discretionary spending was on hold.

U46 does not have an after-the-bell program in place.

"I'm going to support this exemption mostly because the state of Illinois has screwed us enough and I don't support in taking on more of their nonsense," O'Neal Ellis said.

Forgoing the program known as breakfast after the bell will save U46 close to $300,000 annually.

U46 Chief Operating Officer Jeff King said the program would likely increase staffing in the district offices to facilitate more food preparation. While he didn't see personnel increasing in the schools, he said food workers would likely have longer hours because of the additional breakfast services. The increased labor would potentially lead to workers qualifying for health-care benefits, which would increase projected costs, King said.

The vote does not affect any of the current breakfast services offered to students before classes start, King said.

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