ADVOCACY IN ACTION

CHARACTER PACKET

JOBS WITH JUSTICE ORGANIZER

INSIDE:

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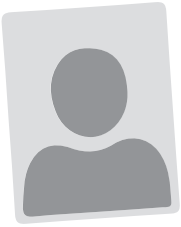
- Blog Post: Adding a Work Requirement to MaineCare Would Harm Maine's Families

MAZON | A Jewish Response To Hunger



JOBS WITH JUSTICE ORGANIZER

BACKGROUND

You are a single parent who was laid off from your minimum wage job at a big-box store after you took off several days to be with your child who was hospitalized with pneumonia. After exhausting your savings, you contacted a local food bank who connected you to your local SNAP agency, allowing you to feed yourself and your daughter while you searched for a new job. Now, you have a relatively stable job as an organizer at Jobs With Justice. This job pays above the minimum wage, and you are able to pay for rent and food, but are still unable to save much. You are putting money aside to eventually enroll in college.

Jobs With Justice is a non-profit group made up of low wage workers who organize around issues affecting low income people in your state, and has been involved in the last few years on campaigns around paid family leave (successful), paid sick leave (unsuccessful), and raising the minimum wage (successful). The group is currently focusing on the Market Bucks bill and you are the paid Organizer for this campaign.

POSITION ON THE BILL

You support the current proposed bill with reservations, and you are hoping to push it further through Amendment 1. You are also willing to let the bill die if you believe it does not go far enough.

- You will push for Amendment 1 and will strongly support the bill if this amendment is included.
- You cannot support the bill if it contains Amendments 2 or 3.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ACTORS

- Senator A is generally supportive of your efforts, though you do not have a particularly close relationship.
- Senator B and Senator C do not like you because Jobs With Justice has been very critical of their stances in the past.
- You would like to work with MAZON and End Hunger Now, but they want to focus their energy on meeting with Senators and other characters, while you want to protest Senator B to let them know their voters care about the bill.

JOBS WITH JUSTICE ORGANIZER

ADDITIONAL GOALS

- Bring the voice of low income workers and SNAP participants into the campaign: Fight negative perceptions people have about SNAP participants and argue that people receiving food stamps deserve and want to eat healthy food. In particular, you should use your own story of food insecurity.
- Try to convince MAZON and End Hunger Now to Join the protest. In order for the protest to happen you need to have both of them, and at least two other characters. If the protest does happen it can look like whatever you want, as long as you all go the State Capitol and make sure its clear who you are protesting and why. The protest can take place during either the Coalition Building/Lobby Visits period or the Public Hearing.

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.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

The Relationship Between SNAP and Work Among Low-Income Households

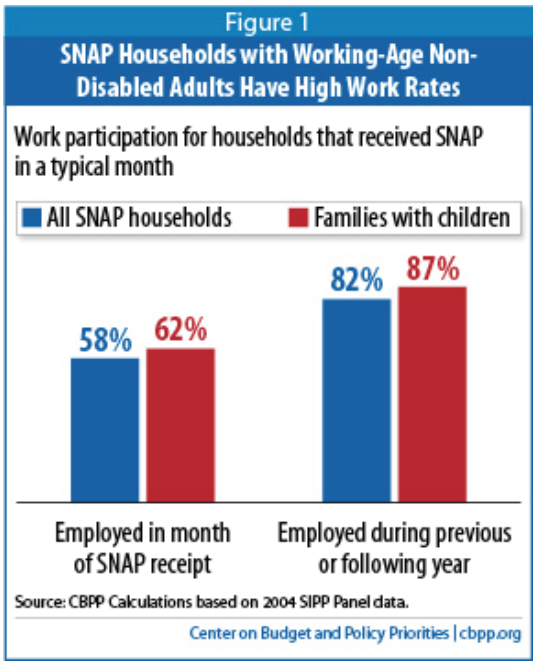
REPORT | JANUARY 30, 2013 | BY DOTTIE ROSENBAUM

Executive Summary

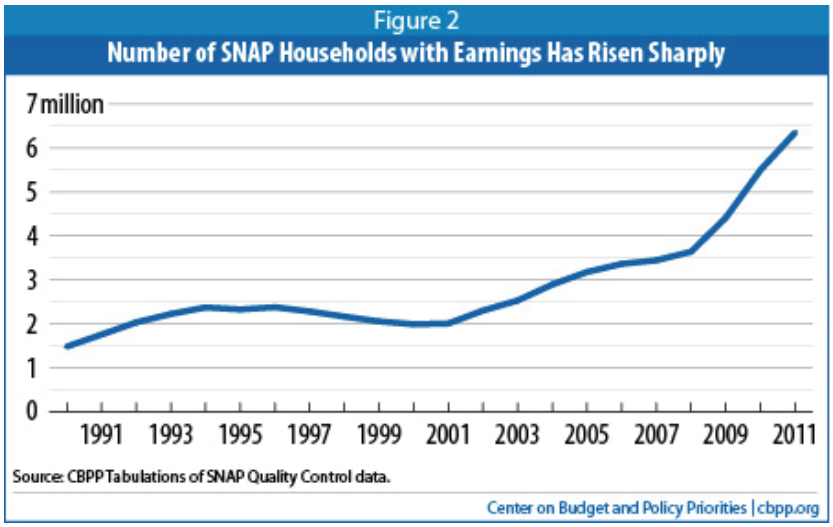
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's (SNAP) primary purpose is to increase the food purchasing power of eligible low-income households in order to improve their nutrition and alleviate hunger and malnutrition.[1] The program's success in meeting this core goal has been well documented.[2] Less well understood is the fact that the program has become quite effective in supporting work and that its performance in this area has improved substantially in recent years.

Labor Force Participation Among SNAP Recipients Is High

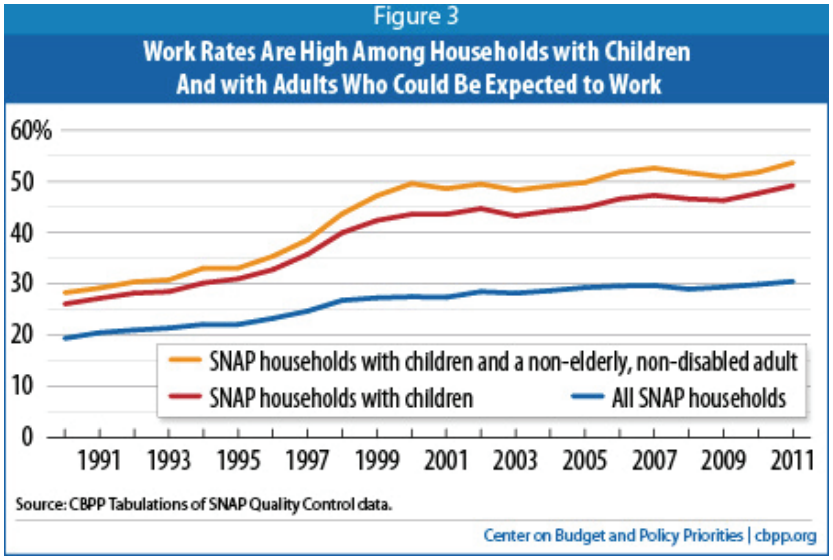
The overwhelming majority of SNAP recipients who can work do so. Among SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult, more than half work while receiving SNAP — and more than 80 percent work in the year prior to or the year after receiving SNAP. The rates are even higher for families with children — more than 60 percent work while receiving SNAP, and almost 90 percent work in the prior or subsequent year. (See Figure 1.)[3]



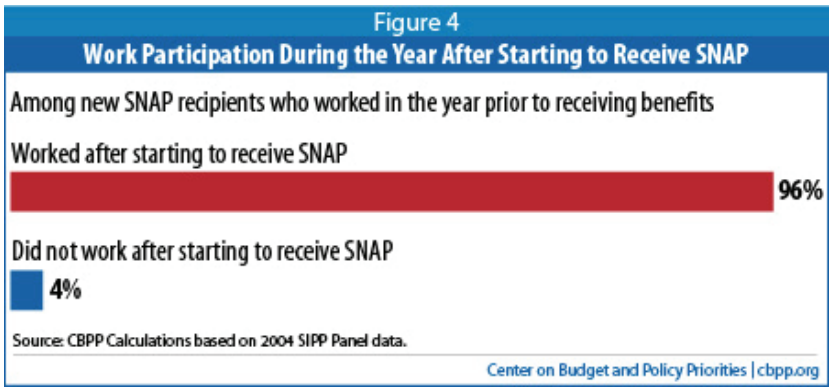
The *number* of SNAP households that have earnings while participating in SNAP has been rising for more than a decade, and has more than tripled — from about 2 million in 2000 to about 6.4 million in 2011. (See Figure 2.) The increase was especially pronounced during the recent deep recession, suggesting that many people have turned to SNAP because of under-employment — for example, when one wage-earner in a two-parent family lost a job, when a worker's hours were cut, or when a worker turned to a lower-paying job after being laid off.



The large increase in the number of working SNAP households in recent years has resulted in the *share* of SNAP households that are working rising, even as the overall number of Americans who are employed declined and the number of long-term unemployed swelled. (See Figure 3.)



The data also indicate that SNAP receipt does not create work disincentives. The overwhelming majority of non-disabled, working-age households that start receiving SNAP do not stop working. In the mid-2000s, only 4 percent of SNAP households that worked in the year before starting to receive SNAP did not work in the following year.[4] (See Figure 4.)



SNAP Is Designed to Support Work

The high labor force participation rate among SNAP recipients is not accidental — SNAP is designed to act both as a safety net for people who are elderly, disabled, or temporarily unemployed *and* to supplement the wages of low-income workers.

- **SNAP's basic structure supports work.** Households that meet the program's eligibility rules and requirements can qualify for benefits and be served if they apply. As a result, SNAP is able both to respond quickly and effectively in recessions and to act as a longer-term support for low-wage workers. SNAP typically boosts low-wage workers' income by 10 percent or more.

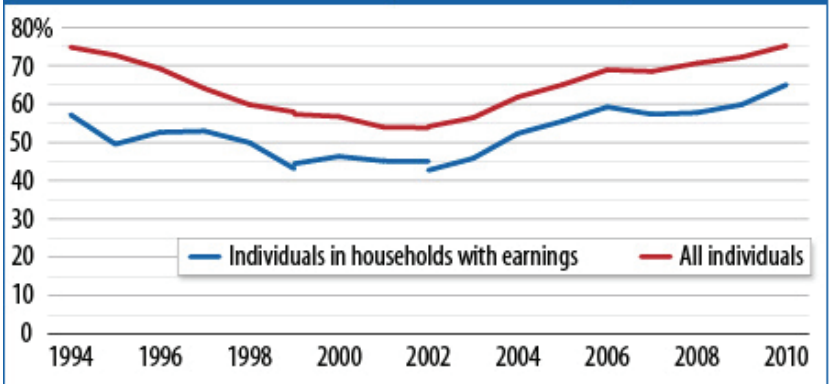
- **The SNAP benefit formula includes work incentives.** SNAP targets benefits based on a household's income and expenses, including a deduction for earned income to reflect the cost of work-related expenses and to function as a work incentive. As a result of the SNAP benefit calculation rules, SNAP households are financially better off if they are able to secure employment or increase their earnings.

- **SNAP cushions the effects of weaknesses in the labor market.** SNAP plays important roles in helping workers who lose their jobs during recessions as well as in supporting low-income workers who are impacted by broader adverse trends in the low-wage labor market. SNAP was the most responsive of all means-tested benefit programs during the recent deep recession and ensuing weak recovery. It also helps workers who struggle to make ends meet when they cannot find higher paying jobs or jobs with sufficient hours.

SNAP's Effectiveness in Serving Workers a Focus in Recent Years

SNAP's performance in reaching eligible working households has improved over the past decade as a result of bipartisan efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to respond to previous weaknesses in this area. The efforts have paid off, with estimated participation rates (i.e., the portion of eligible households that actually receives benefits) hitting highs in recent years; the SNAP participation rate among eligible low-income working families, which fell after enactment of the 1996 welfare law (although that was not what the authors of the law intended), rose from 43 percent in 2002 to about 65 percent in 2010. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5
National SNAP Participation Rates at New Highs



Note: The discontinuities in 1999 and 2002 reflect changes in methodology for calculating SNAP participation rates by the USDA. The USDA also revised its methodology for the 2010 rates. Because of these revisions the level of the participation rate is not comparable across all time periods.

Source: Esa Eslami, Joshua Leftin, and Mark Strayer, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2010," U.S. Department of Agriculture, December 2012, and earlier reports in the series.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | cbpp.org

Click here to view a PDF of the full report

End notes:

[1] See section 2 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011). SNAP was known as the Food Stamp Program until 2008.

[2] See, for example, U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Building a Healthy America: A Profile of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," April 2012; Fox, Mary Kay, William Hamilton, and Biing-Hwan Lin, "Effects of Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs on Nutrition and Health, Volume 4, Executive Summary of the Literature Review," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, November, 2004; and additional research available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-(snap)/background.aspx.

[3] The figures are based on data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) for the mid-2000s, before the recent recession, but preliminary analysis finds that they declined only modestly during the recession. For this analysis SNAP household members are considered to be working-age if they are age 18 through 59 and are disabled if they receive a disability-based benefit, such as Social Security or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

[4] The sample sizes for this analysis are small so the results should be viewed with caution, but they strongly indicate that SNAP does not cause people to leave the labor force.

TOPICS: Food Assistance, SNAP Basics

Letters to the editor

http://www.stltoday.com/opinion/mailbag/reject-higher-sales-taxes-which-hurt-poor-and-middle-income/article_546de11a-06d5-59ba-90dd-27a95f966736.html

Reject higher sales taxes, which hurt poor and middle-income voters

Mar 29, 2017

Voters line up in voting booths to cast their ballots at Robious Elementary School in Richmond, Va. on Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2016. The 30-ft. x 12-ft. image in the background was painted by 3rd and 4th graders at the school in preparation for Veterans Day. (Shelby Lum/Richmond Times-Dispatch via AP)

Beware of the wolf in sheep's clothing. The sales tax increases proposed in Tuesday's election promise much to the general public, but such is not the case.

Middle-income and poverty voters, and all fair-minded people, should vote a resounding no on all proposed sales tax increases. Vote no at least on Proposition 1 in St. Louis, Proposition P in St. Louis County and Proposition A in Moline Acres.

A yes vote on all of these sales tax increases would increase taxes on items that poor and middle-income people spend a high percentage of their income on, such as food, drugs and household goods. Items the richer people spend a high percentage of their income on, such as financial transactions, would not be subject to sales taxes in Missouri, even though they should be.

The proponents of this travesty always tell you that sales tax increases will be spent on worthy items such as more police officers, wage increases for policemen or economic development and better public transportation. However there is no guarantee the increased government revenue will be spent on these items, as the money will probably be diverted to other things.

Robert Reinhold • St. Louis County

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

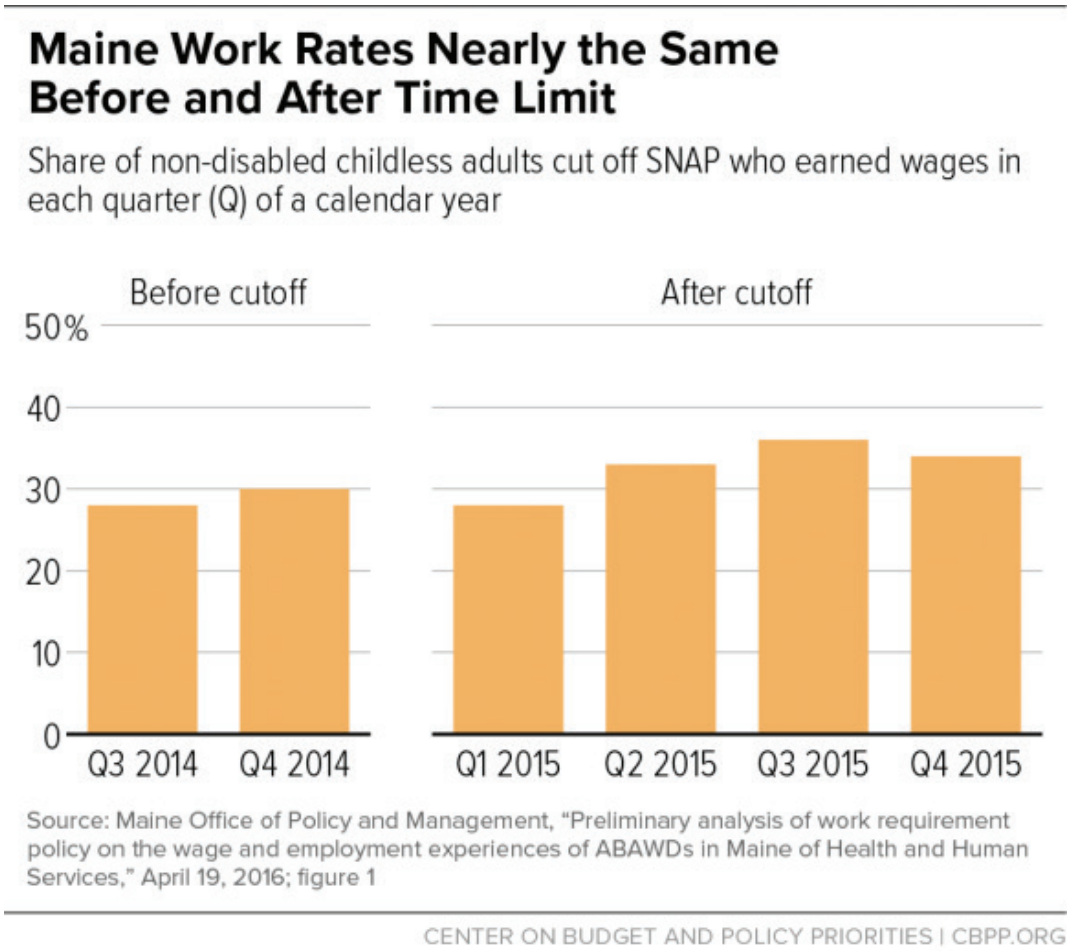
Adding a Work Requirement to MaineCare Would Harm Maine's Families

BLOG POST | APRIL 18, 2017 AT 4:45 PM | BY HANNAH KATCH

Maine's Governor Paul LePage reportedly plans to seek federal approval to require low-income adults to prove they are employed in order to keep their Medicaid benefits, basing the approach on a misleading report about the state's experience with a three-month time limit for childless adults in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps). As we've explained, the data from Maine show that this time limit has *not* significantly raised work rates, as the governor claims, but has instead increased hardship for many by cutting off their SNAP benefits, which are equal to about $5 a day in food assistance. Imposing a Medicaid work requirement would likely have the same kind of result, leaving low-income people without health coverage.

In October 2014, Maine began limiting adults without dependent children to just three months of SNAP unless they were working, or could find a spot in a work training program or a place to perform sufficient community service. As a result, thousands of adults lost their food assistance after three months.

State data show that work rates among those who lost benefits barely increased after the time limit took effect (see chart). There's no evidence that the adults who found work wouldn't have found it anyway in an improving economy, as many low-income adults work when they can, often in low-wage jobs with high turnover. One survey of food pantry users in Maine found that over half of those who were cut off due to the limit were looking for work but couldn't find it; more than three-quarters reported increased visits to the food pantry in the year they lost benefits.



As in SNAP, Gov. LePage's proposed work requirement likely wouldn't substantially change work rates, but it could cause many vulnerable people to lose their Medicaid coverage. Already, few adults are eligible for MaineCare, Maine's Medicaid program, because the state rejected the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion that would have allowed the state to cover all low-income adults. MaineCare eligibility for adults is limited to seniors, people with disabilities, pregnant women, adults with HIV/AIDS, and parents with annual family incomes up to $25,830 for a family of four. (Gov. LePage also proposed earlier this year to lower Medicaid eligibility for parents to $9,720 per year for a family of four.)

A work requirement would allow even fewer adults to enroll in Medicaid. For people with health conditions like HIV/AIDS, uncontrolled diabetes, or an opioid addiction, Medicaid can enable them to access treatment that could help them join the workforce and stay employed. If they lose coverage, it's more difficult to stay healthy and to find and hold a job.

Maine's Health and Human Services Commissioner, who oversees both the SNAP time limit and Medicaid, said that linking assistance to work helps both beneficiaries and Maine companies seeking to fill jobs. But the reality is that nationwide, most people on Medicaid who can work do so, and of those that don't, most are caring for a family member or have serious health problems. A Medicaid work requirement isn't likely to change that.

TOPICS: Health, Medicaid and CHIP, Food Assistance