

2025 Budget Reconciliation: Oppose Cuts to the Federal Food and Nutrition Programs

Food insecurity is rising — cutting SNAP will make a bad situation worse in every community across the nation.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the cornerstone of delivering the basic needs of nutrition and food security in the U.S., helping over 42 million people afford to put food on the table each month. The pandemic-era boosts to SNAP benefits directly reduced food insecurity during 2019–2021. However, once those boosts ended, food insecurity increased and remains higher today than pre-pandemic levels. This is at a time when food costs have surged, and yet some in Congress seek to weaken the most effective program to fight hunger by cutting upwards of \$230 billion from SNAP. These harmful proposals must be rejected, including the three listed below.

■ **Benefit cost shift:** Currently, the federal government funds 100 percent of SNAP benefits and equally shares administrative costs with states. A proposal to shift benefit costs to states as punishment for payment errors is harmful and unnecessary. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) already penalizes states with high payment error rates, giving them time to improve before fines are imposed. This proposal would impose an unfunded mandate, forcing states with tight budgets to raise taxes, cut other essential programs, or reduce SNAP access. Cuts will remove families from SNAP, limit children's access to free school meals, jeopardize access to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), harm local economies, and lead to serious long-term health consequences for low-wage families.

■ **Thrifty Food Plan:** The bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to update the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), resulting in the first meaningful update in SNAP benefits in nearly 50 years. In 2021, USDA modernized the TFP to reflect current nutrition guidelines, food prices, and consumer-purchasing patterns. This benefit increase averaged out to \$1.19 per person per day and resulted in lifting more than two million people, including nearly one million children, above the poverty line when it went into effect. Current proposals to cancel future benefit adjustments and/or revert to pre-2021 benefit levels would impose harmful cuts at a time when food prices and hunger

are rising. If enacted, these proposals would immediately reduce benefits by an average of \$1.40 per person per day, dropping the projected fiscal year (FY) 2026 benefit from \$6.40 to just \$5 per day, making it harder for families to afford the food they need.

■ **Time limits:** Congress requires able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), ages 18–54, to work at least 20 hours per week to receive SNAP. Those who are unable to meet this requirement may receive benefits for only three months within a 36-month period. In 2023, Congress raised the cutoff age from 49 to 54, with the change sent to expire in 2030. Yet, some in Congress propose to increase the age to over 60. This would harm older adults, who face longer periods of unemployment and lack many of the technical skills required in today's job market. As of March 2025, over 30 percent of unemployed women ages 45–64 had been unemployed for six months or more, nearly double the rate of younger women. Other proposals seek to include parents with children over age 7, ignoring the realities of low-wage jobs, inconsistent schedules, and unaffordable child care. Expanding time limits will reduce critical food assistance for struggling families, harming children's development and health outcomes.

Congress must reject these and other proposals that would weaken and cut SNAP, and instead, work to improve food security by strengthening the program.

Cuts to SNAP and Medicaid would hurt school meals. Children in SNAP households are automatically certified for free school meals, and most states use Medicaid data as well. If Congress decreases the number of families eligible for SNAP and Medicaid, students in those families would lose their direct certification for free school meals and will need to submit a school meal application. This would create more paperwork for families and schools and would lead to some students falling through the cracks and missing out on the benefits of school meals. It also would reduce the

number of schools that are eligible to offer free meals to all of their students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), and would make it less financially viable for the schools that are still eligible to participate because reimbursements are primarily based on the number of students who are directly certified.

At the start of the budget reconciliation process, some in Congress also proposed \$12 billion in cuts to school meals programs. The proposals would substantially reduce access to free school meals by decreasing the number of schools eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision and making it harder for eligible families to apply for free or reduced-price school meals. While the House Education and the Workforce Committee reported out its reconciliation bill without any cuts to school meals — and instead made draconian cuts to higher education that would harm students from low-income families — it is important to continue to push back on those proposals to ensure that any final budget reconciliation package does not include cuts to school meals.

■ **CEP supports students, families, and schools:**

CEP allows schools serving large numbers of children from families with low incomes to offer school meals at no charge to all students. At CEP schools, all students have access to nutritious meals, ensuring they are ready to get the most out of their school day. School meal debt is eliminated and stigma associated with school meals is reduced. Families can count on breakfast and lunch for their children at school, which reduces the pressure on their household budget.

- **CEP streamlines school meal operations:** Rather than collecting and processing school meal applications to determine a school's federal reimbursements, CEP schools use a different method. Schools are reimbursed based on the percentage of students who are automatically certified for free school meals due to participation in a means-tested program, such as SNAP, or by belonging to an eligible category, such as being homeless or in foster care.

- **Proposed cuts to CEP would negatively impact millions of students:** Currently, if at least 25 percent of students are certified automatically for free school meals, a school can use CEP. One proposal would increase that threshold to 60 percent, resulting in over 24,000 schools nationwide, serving more than 12 million children, no longer being eligible for CEP.

■ **Processing additional school meal paperwork would be a burden for families and schools:**

Another proposal would require all families who apply and are approved for free and reduced-price school meals (non-CEP schools) to document their household income when they submit their school meal application. Many eligible children would fall through the cracks, and the administrative burden on schools to process school meal applications would dramatically increase.

Now is the time for Congress to protect and strengthen school meals, not weaken them.

Rather than reducing access to school meals — including by making harmful cuts to SNAP and Medicaid — Congress should invest in CEP and reduce barriers to applying for free or reduced-price school meals, so families can afford groceries, children have access to the nutritious meals they need to thrive in school and beyond, and schools are not excessively burdened with administrative red tape. Ensuring that students are well-fed is part of safeguarding the health and well-being of our country's children, which is essential to our national security.

See how proposed cuts to SNAP and school meals would harm families in your state.

