

Expanding SNAP Eligibility for Students of Higher Education

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June 29, 2024

For years, higher education students were ineligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits unless they met specific criteria. By mandating students meet eligibility requirements such as working 20 hours a week, participating in a work-study program, or caring for a child under six, students faced significant barriers to accessing SNAP benefits while pursuing their education. This policy primarily impacted people of color (POC) students, first-generation college students, and low-income students, making it more difficult for these community members to complete their education. Consequently, food insecurity has slowed down the rate at which individuals could lift themselves out of poverty and perpetuated disparities within these marginalized communities.

Rising inflation, shrinkflation, and the high cost of housing have compounded the problem. In addition to the rising cost of living, tuition has also increased, intensifying the economic hardship low-income students face. Since the student eligibility rule has been in place for years, many students may assume they are ineligible for SNAP when they may be meeting one of the criteria elements. This misconception prevents eligible students from accessing the benefits they need. Focusing on uplifting our more marginalized community members is a wise investment as it enhances our collective strength and is a matter of social justice. We should ensure access to SNAP benefits is equitable and accessible to all, including college students.

Congress should modify the policy regarding students' eligibility for SNAP to lower the minimum required hours worked per week from 20 to 10. This compromise keeps the work requirement while making the minimum hours more realistically attainable for full-time students to meet. This simple change can increase the number of

students eligible for SNAP benefits. However, maintaining a minimum baseline work requirement should appease critics who believe that students should demonstrate a commitment to self-sufficiency while receiving government assistance. Critics may see fraud or abuse potential with any changes to policy that result in broader access to the program. Still, a verification process is already in place and can be modified to meet the new lower work requirement. There will always be budgetary concerns regarding publicly funded programs, but we can no longer ignore this population that have been excluded from SNAP assistance for many years.

Lowering the work hours students must meet from 20 to 10 hours can significantly expand access to the SNAP program, ensuring more college students can alleviate food insecurity. It would also foster a more inclusive and supportive environment where students can focus on their educational goals without worrying about where they will get their next meal. The policy change will impact today's hunger and improve the overall betterment of underprivileged communities and allow this generation to more easily lift themselves out of poverty. By addressing this barrier, we can pave a way for a more equitable future where all students have the resources needed to thrive.

References

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