

HB 1659 as Amended Would Cut Off Food Assistance to People Who Can't Find Work, Regardless of Whether there Are Jobs for Them

Pennsylvania House Bill (HB) 1659, as amended by the sponsor, would prohibit the Governor from seeking waivers of the current three-month SNAP time limit for unemployed, childless adults in areas with high unemployment. *Regardless of how few jobs are available in their community*, adults unable to find jobs would be denied food assistance through no fault of their own.

In 1996, Congress adopted a three-month SNAP time limit for adults aged 18-50 without children, who are not working 20 hours a week. Recognizing the harshness of this rule where there are not enough jobs for everyone, it authorized Governors to seek waivers of the time limit for areas with high unemployment. Since that time, **all of Pennsylvania's Republican and Democratic governors have sought waivers to ensure that jobless adults in areas without enough jobs can get 100% federally-funded SNAP benefits.**

Cutting off food assistance to people who can't find work will not make Pennsylvania stronger. Instead, we should boost wages and the economy, and offer job training for those looking for work.

- Currently, able-bodied adults aged 18-50 without children can only get three months of SNAP (food stamp) benefits in 36 months, unless they are working 20 hours a week or meet one of a few exemptions. These rules apply in areas where there are enough jobs. In areas of high unemployment, the Governor has sought a waiver to allow jobless people to continue to receive food assistance.
- **HB 1659 would prohibit the Governor from taking advantage of the federal safety valve to protect people who can't get a job through no fault of their own:** the ability to seek waivers of the time limit in areas of high unemployment.
- Many who would lose SNAP would be those whose jobs will not give them a steady schedule of 20 hours a week or more, people with limited educations or criminal records that make employers reluctant to hire them, people with addictions they are struggling to overcome, and people with health problems that limit their ability to work on a regular basis. **Cutting off their SNAP will not help them get jobs but will just make it harder for them to pay for the food they need while they struggle to find work.**
- Unlike other states, Pennsylvania does not guarantee work opportunities for those who want to work but can't find a job. People who cannot find jobs may lose SNAP through no fault of their own.
- SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded. Cutting off an additional 90,000 Pennsylvanians from SNAP would result in the **loss of \$130 million or more per year in federal funds spent in our grocery stores and farmer's markets.** Screening to see whether any of these 90,000 people should be exempt requires state bureaucracy that must be paid for in part with state dollars.



- The bill as written also appears to prevent DHS from taking advantage of so-called “15% exemptions” that DHS uses to provide food assistance to people who:
 - Are homeless;
 - Expect to return to work within 60 days;
 - Live more than two hours round trip from an employment/education training site;
 - Receive expedited SNAP (that is, are desperately poor and receiving their first month of SNAP benefits).

- This bill is premature. Congress is debating changes to SNAP rules through this year’s Farm Bill. The SNAP work requirements and rules for geographic waivers may change dramatically. Pennsylvania should not tie its hands on options that may change dramatically later this year.

- Taking away food assistance will not:
 - Create work opportunities in areas currently lacking jobs;
 - Increase hours for part-time workers who would gladly work more hours;
 - Expand access to education or skills training opportunities for low-wage workers to advance to positions with better pay and benefits; or
 - Address the barriers to work that some individuals face.

