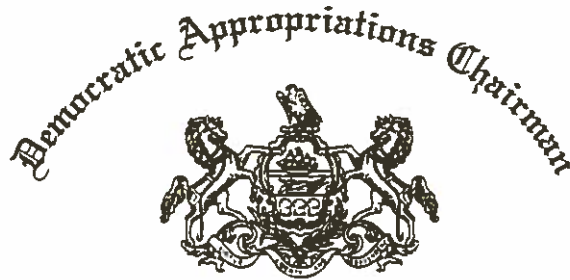


7TH DISTRICT
VINCENT HUGHES
SENATE BOX 203007
THE STATE CAPITOL
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-3007
717-787-7112
FAX: 717-772-0579

2401 NORTH 54TH STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19131
215-879-7777
FAX: 215-879-7778

EMAIL: hughes@psenate.com
TWITTER: @SenHughesOffice
FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/Vincent.Hughes.7](https://www.facebook.com/Vincent.Hughes.7)
WEB: www.senatorhughes.com



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Senate of Pennsylvania

July 25, 2019

Program Design Branch
Program Development Division
Food and Nutrition Service
United States Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

Docket ID Number FNS-2018-0037

To Whom It May Concern:

I strongly oppose the proposed rule change relating to Section 5(a) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, which would limit the categorical eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The purpose of SNAP is to provide "nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency." The proposed rule change is an affront to the purpose of the program, which is to move individuals towards self-sufficiency. According to your department's own information, 3.1 million (or approximately 8%) of SNAP participants could be removed from the program as a result of the proposed change. Nearly two million Pennsylvanians receive SNAP benefits with more than 62% of those being families and children.

This proposed rule change is an assault on a vital program. SNAP benefits help ensure that financially-stressed families will not have to make the incredibly difficult decision of paying for shelter or childcare or purchasing healthy food. The "categorical eligibility" provision in SNAP allows additional households to access benefits and put a healthy meal on their table.

According to an estimate from Governing Magazine, approximately 130,800 Pennsylvanians will lose benefits if this proposed rule change is adopted. That 130,800 potentially includes families, individuals with disabilities, children, disabled veterans, individuals escaping domestic violence and single parents.

Public Comments

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This proposed rule change could rip life sustaining benefits from a disabled veteran who is unable to work because of a disability suffered serving our country. This change could pull the rug out from a single mother who has made a difficult decision to escape a domestic violence situation and relies on the assistance from SNAP benefits to feed her and her children.

Under the current rules, Pennsylvania families who participate in SNAP are certified for participation in federally subsidized or free school meal programs. This change will reduce the number of students and schools across the Commonwealth who are receiving free or reduced school meals. Often these students do not have three meals a day and rely on these free or reduced school meals as their primary, and in certain cases, only source of nutrition. We are currently in the summer months where many of these students who receive free or reduced school meals are sometimes struggling to find food to eat one meal a day. The proposed rule change could make the summer food insecurity of these students a year-round issue.

We should make it easier for individuals and families to access assistance programs, such as SNAP, that help give them a hand up when they need it most. Instead, this proposed rule change is a shameful continuation of the larger nationwide attack on programs for individuals and families who have fallen on hard times. In Pennsylvania, the General Assistance Program was recently eliminated which leaves more than 11,000 Pennsylvanians without a small cash stipend that helped them pay for transportation costs to get to doctor's appointments or buy common, yet necessary, toiletries.

I strongly oppose this rule change for the reasons laid out in these comments, and I urge you to retract the proposed rule change and leave the categorical eligibility rules as they currently stand.

Sincerely,



Senator Vincent J. Hughes

Pennsylvania State Senate
Democratic Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
7th Senatorial District