
Congress Set to Extend Vital Protections for Victims of SNAP Benefit Theft

*Statement of Ty Jones Cox, CBPP Vice President for Food Assistance, on the continuation of benefit theft protections
in proposed farm bill extension:*

Legislation to temporarily extend food and agriculture programs authorized by the farm bill, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), will also extend protections for victims of SNAP benefit theft through September 30, 2028. Thanks to leadership from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, low-income families whose SNAP benefits are stolen will maintain the ability to have those benefits restored in the coming years. Without these critical protections, hundreds of thousands of low-income households across the country would be left with no way to feed their families when their benefits are stolen. SNAP participants, who have low incomes and few resources to fall back on, must not be forced to bear the cost of these crimes.

SNAP participants nationwide have been targeted by electronic benefit theft, which is often facilitated by well-disguised skimming devices that surreptitiously capture households' Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card information without their knowledge. The criminals typically drain SNAP recipients' accounts shortly after benefits are deposited, often leaving them with a belt full of groceries and no benefits to pay for the food. This problem is compounded by past policy decisions that have made EBT card users particularly vulnerable to this type of theft, including the use of less secure card technology and Congress's decision decades ago to explicitly exclude EBT card users from certain protections afforded to consumers using other payment methods.

For the last two years, Congress has authorized states to replace stolen SNAP benefits, with some limitations, using federal funds. To date, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that states have replaced more than \$150 million in benefits stolen from more than 300,000 low-income SNAP households across the country. The federal government, state agencies, EBT processors and retailers, and law enforcement are making much-needed strides to detect and prevent this theft, but these measures cannot be implemented overnight, nor are they guaranteed to stop the problem entirely. Low-income families who have done nothing wrong will remain vulnerable.

This legislation is a critical, bipartisan step to protect victims in the coming years. Congress must build on this progress and establish permanent protections to ensure that future victims are not left without food or recourse. As the U.S. faces rising food insecurity, protecting and strengthening SNAP should be a top priority as lawmakers continue to work on a full five-year farm bill reauthorization and other legislative priorities in the next Congress.

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