

House Farm Bill's SNAP Cuts, Work Requirements Would Hurt People with Disabilities



The House farm bill (H.R. 2) would end or cut SNAP (formerly food stamp) benefits for a substantial number of people with disabilities, [increasing food insecurity and hardship](#).

SNAP is the country's most effective anti-hunger program, helping 1 in 8 Americans afford a basic diet. Despite providing modest benefits averaging about \$1.40 per person per meal, it combats food insecurity, alleviates poverty, and has long-term positive impacts on health as well as on children's educational attainment. The program is especially important for the more than 6 million people with disabilities who are estimated to participate in the program, including 4 million non-elderly adults who receive disability benefits, close to another 2 million who don't receive disability benefits but have work-limiting health conditions, and many children. Individuals with disabilities are at higher risk of food insecurity, making SNAP benefits a particularly important intervention for them.

For more than 15 years, state and federal policymakers have worked on a bipartisan basis to strengthen SNAP. This bill would take a large step backward, reducing or eliminating benefits for more than 1 million households with more than 2 million people. It would make significant overall cuts to SNAP and put in place unworkable, expanded work requirements that would take benefits away from people who don't meet them, despite the [evidence](#) that such requirements do little to improve employment. Many people with disabilities would be hurt.

Unwieldy Work Requirements Would Burden Recipients and States

SNAP already requires working-age adults (with limited exceptions) to register for work and accept a job if offered. States can go further and impose very tough work requirements (up to 30 hours a week) and cut off benefits for people who don't comply. And, individuals aged 18-49 without children can only participate for three months out of every three years unless they are working 20 hours per week, a policy that has led [many poor participants to lose SNAP](#).

The House bill would impose an even harsher policy, requiring most adult SNAP participants, including parents who have no children under age 6 and older workers up to age 60 (among others), to prove every month that they worked, participated in a work program for at least 20 hours a week, or qualified for an exemption. Workers whose employers don't provide enough hours or who don't have paid sick leave, and recipients, including caregivers and those with disabilities, who can't navigate a bureaucratic exemption process could lose their SNAP benefits.

Beginning in 2021, an estimated 7.5 million people would have to prove every month that they met the requirement or were exempt. This could include many of the estimated 1 million adult SNAP recipients who do not receive disability benefits but have a work-limiting health condition (and who do not have children under age 6), as well as many others who are caring for adult and child family members with disabilities. States would have to build expensive systems to track each of these SNAP participants every month. An estimated 3.4 million SNAP participants would need a job training or employment program to retain SNAP benefits — a number that far exceeds current job training programs. The bill's new funding for such programs is woefully inadequate, amounting to less than \$30 per month for each recipient who would need a work slot to retain benefits — [well short](#) of the cost for effective employment programs. States would find it impossible to provide high-quality job training for those that need it.

Recipients with health conditions who weren't exempt but couldn't comply with the requirements would be at risk of harsh sanctions: the first failure would mean a loss of benefits for 12 months, while each subsequent failure would lock out individuals for 36 months. They could regain eligibility only by working at least half time for a month or requalifying through an exemption.

Many People with Disabilities Would Lose Some or All Benefits

The House farm bill would make it harder for some people with disabilities to afford an adequate diet. It would result in benefits being taken away from recipients who themselves have a physical or mental impairment and those caring for family members — both children and adults — with disabilities or serious health conditions.

Many SNAP recipients with disabilities who should be exempt would likely still lose benefits. Adults receiving disability benefits would likely be *automatically* exempt from the expanded work requirements, but many people with disabilities do not receive those benefits and would have to prove they qualify for an exemption. Still others are caregivers for adult and child family members with health impairments.

The bill would take away SNAP benefits from these individuals if they did not successfully navigate a difficult exemption process or meet the hours requirements. Recipients would have to understand that they qualified for an exemption and then gather documentation from medical providers to prove they should be exempt, which might be particularly difficult for SNAP recipients who lack health insurance or have mental health conditions that make managing red tape challenging. If they were able to gather the documentation, the caseworker would have to make an appropriate decision and process the paperwork. If there was a problem with any step of this process, the individual could lose SNAP.

Those caring for children or adults with disabilities also could lose benefits. Families raising children with disabilities — and those caring for adults and seniors with serious health conditions — face real challenges. Frequent medical and school appointments can take time away from work and make it harder to keep a job. And families can face higher food expenses due to the specialized nutrition needs of those with certain serious health conditions. But caregivers might not be exempt from the farm bill's work requirements because they did not know to apply or could not supply adequate documentation.

Moreover, many recipients with significant caregiving responsibilities might fail to qualify for an exemption under the bill's strict standard that the individual needing care must be "incapacitated." Those who weren't exempt would risk losing SNAP if attending medical appointments or meetings at a child's school forced them to miss hours of work or participation in a work program. Parenting a child with a disability or caring for a frail senior or adult with a disability is difficult and time-consuming — added paperwork, mandated participation in ineffective work programs, and loss of SNAP benefits would make it even harder for them to manage these responsibilities and afford food.

Underfunded employment programs would be unlikely to provide effective job training for participants with disabilities. The bill's employment services funding, amounting to less than \$30 per month per recipient who needs a work program to retain benefits, is woefully inadequate. The funds are likely only enough to cover low-intensity services that lack the specialized training and supports that a recipient with disabilities may need to succeed in the labor market. Recipients who failed in these poorly designed programs would lose the food assistance they need.

Recipients who work could still lose SNAP. Many people with disabilities work — often in low-wage jobs with unstable hours — but many might only be able to work a limited number of hours each week due to their health conditions. Even those who typically meet the 20-hour requirement would face a SNAP sanction if they missed work and could not document that it was for a good reason, which would be hard for many, particularly those facing a health crisis.

New paperwork requirements would make it harder for people with disabilities to access SNAP. This bill makes several changes that increase paperwork burdens and eliminate state efforts to streamline administration, raising barriers to access for participants with disabilities. Under the bill's new requirements, including those involving income eligibility, more applicants and recipients would have to provide proof that their assets (including the value of a car) are below a certain value and document their hours of employment each month. In addition, more recipients would have to come into the SNAP office for a face-to-face visit if they misplaced their SNAP electronic benefit card. Each of these proposals would make the program less accessible and make it more likely that people with disabilities would lose SNAP benefits as a result.