

House Farm Bill's SNAP Cuts, Work Requirements Would Hurt Veterans



The House farm bill (H.R. 2) would end or cut SNAP (formerly food stamp) benefits for a substantial number of low-income Americans, including veterans, [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 [helps](#) nearly 1.5 million low-income veterans each year, who have acute needs and may struggle to find work, may be employed in low-wage jobs, or may have disabilities or chronic health issues. Like other SNAP participants, veterans in the program are diverse — they are working families with children, women, people with disabilities, and older workers and seniors. The country values the service and sacrifice of veterans and their families, and programs like SNAP can be important to meeting their needs.

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. Low-income veterans would be caught up in these harmful changes.

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, and states would have to build expensive systems to track them. 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 veterans who need it.

Veterans 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.

Some Veterans Would Face SNAP Cuts

The House farm bill would make it harder for some veterans to afford an adequate diet. It could result in benefits being taken away from recipients in low-wage jobs or those struggling to find work, and from recipients who face serious physical or mental health conditions.

Work requirements are not aligned with existing job training for unemployed and underemployed veterans.

Unemployed, low-income veterans who do not have dependent children and do not receive disability benefits already face a harsh SNAP time limit that has resulted in many losing benefits. This bill's even harsher requirements would threaten the food assistance of still more veterans, many of whom face significant barriers to finding adequate

employment. For example, young veterans who leave active duty may have little work experience beyond military service, and searching for a new job while still in the military can be particularly difficult.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has programs to help veterans gain the skills they need for civilian employment and acquire stable jobs. But those VA programs are not necessarily designed to meet the bill's minimum hours requirement. If the programs offered fewer than 20 qualifying hours per week, veterans would have to do extra work or training or else they would lose SNAP benefits.

Furthermore, the employment services funding that the bill provides, an average of less than \$30 per month per recipient, is likely only enough to cover low-intensity services that lack the specialized training and supports that a low-income veteran may need to succeed in the labor market. Recipients who failed in these poorly designed programs would lose the food assistance they need.

Veterans with disabilities or serious health conditions who should be exempt could still lose benefits. Veterans whom the VA deems 100 percent disabled would likely be *automatically* exempt from the expanded work requirements. But many others — including those with moderate to severe physical and mental health conditions that could impact their ability to work but are deemed to have a lower degree of disability, or those with disabilities unrelated to their service — would have to meet the minimum hours or navigate a difficult process to prove they should be exempt. Recipients would have to understand they could qualify for an exemption and then gather documentation from medical providers, which may be particularly difficult for SNAP recipients who have physical or mental health conditions that make managing red tape challenging. The caseworker then would have to make an appropriate decision and process the paperwork. If there were a problem with any step of this process, the individual could lose SNAP. Approximately 21 percent of veterans on SNAP reported having a service-related disability of some kind.

Veterans who are older workers or seniors could be hurt. Individuals aged 50 through 59 would be subject to the new rigid requirements. About 25 percent of veterans who participate in SNAP each year fall into this age group, which is currently underserved in both SNAP's dedicated employment and training program and other workforce development programs. Research shows that older workers face specific challenges to finding a job, including age discrimination, health and ability struggles, and caregiving responsibilities. And seniors, who make up over 40 percent of veterans who get SNAP each year, could be hurt. If other household members subject to the work requirement saw their SNAP benefits cut, fewer resources would be available to the entire household for food.

New paperwork requirements would make it harder for some veterans to access SNAP. This bill makes several changes that increase paperwork burdens and eliminate state efforts to streamline administration, raising barriers to access for veteran participants who are seniors or have physical and mental health conditions. Under the bill's new requirements, including those involving income eligibility, more applicants and recipients would have to document their utility costs, 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 veterans with disabilities or chronic health conditions would lose SNAP benefits as a result.