

# Children’s Defense Fund – New York

June 20th, 2018



## The Senate 2018 Farm Bill Aims to Improve SNAP Benefits

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow released the Senate Farm Bill on June 8, 2018. The Bill includes a bipartisan nutrition title that aims to protect and strengthen the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an anti-hunger program that was reauthorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. Unlike the House’s proposed Farm Bill that is up for reconsideration by June 22, 2018, the Senate recognizes SNAP’s success – after all, one in four United States children participate in SNAP.<sup>1</sup> The Senate understands that bolstering the program, rather than cutting SNAP funding – which is what the House proposes -- will reap productive and positive results for the millions of SNAP participants – including over 1 million New York children.

The Senate Agriculture Committee Farm Bill includes various nutrition provisions, all of which are categorized under the nutrition provision headlines that are **highlighted** below. Included in this chart are specific provisions upon which are elaborated in this brief.

<b>Investing in other nutrition initiatives and grants</b> -Maintaining nutrition education -Reauthorizing SNAP
<b>Strengthening relationship between employers and SNAP employment and training</b> -Extending 2014 farm bill employment and training pilots
<b>Modernizing and improving systems and technology</b> -Assessing and improving electronic benefits transfer (EBT) systems
<b>Making targeted SNAP improvements for certain populations</b>
<b>Strengthening program integrity</b> -Creating a national interstate data match to prevent duplicate participation

(Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018)

<sup>1</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2018). SNAP Works for America’s Children. [Online].

## Maintaining Nutrition Education

The Senate Farm Bill plans to continue state-level nutrition education efforts, and would not change any of its funding levels. It is crucial for community members to be exposed to nutrition education. Learning about nutrition is the first step a healthy and productive life. Improper nutrition, especially in children, can be extremely detrimental to their development and can lead to serious physical and mental health illnesses.

With the Senate's provision to continue funding state-level nutrition education, more programs can be implemented to reach all ages and work to expand people's knowledge of health. With an increased exposure to health knowledge in a community, community members themselves can become advocates of leading a healthy lifestyle, which is behavior that can be modeled by anyone. Children's minds are still very much developing, and are especially vulnerable to adopting unhealthy nutrition and lifestyle habits if exposed at a young age. It is crucial to continue these educative efforts to eradicate unhealthy behaviors in households and to enforce positive models for children.

## Reauthorizing SNAP

The Senate Farm Bill would extend the authorization of SNAP and other nutrition programs through 2023.

The proposal to extend SNAP would reassure all SNAP participants. The effective anti-hunger program would continue to support millions of individuals by providing access to nutritious food and help maintain households' food security statuses, nationwide.

## Extending the 2014 Farm Bill Employment and Training Pilots

The 2014 Farm Bill issued \$200 million to fund ten state pilot programs to test various approaches to SNAP employment services, work programs, and work requirements.<sup>2</sup> A key element of this initiative was to establish reliable data that represents the results of SNAP employment and training (E&T) programs. Policymakers would be able to use this information to make informed decisions about establishing successful approaches in the future. All of these approaches aim to connect participating SNAP E&T individuals to the workforce.

Currently, each pilot project is undergoing an intense evaluation process that records employment and earnings for years after an individual's participation. While these results are not yet available to inform the upcoming Farm Bill, the Senate's Farm Bill plans to continue this research by giving more states an opportunity to operate similar pilot programs for their respective populations. The Senate would provide \$185 million toward the funding of approved states' pilot programs.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from increasing funding for SNAP E&T programs, the Senate's Bill proposes to prioritize the populations which are typically underserved, including: older workers, those recovering from substance

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<sup>2</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2018). Summary of the 2014 Farm Bill Nutrition Title: Includes Bipartisan Improvements to SNAP While Excluding Harsh House Provisions. [Online].

<sup>3</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2018). Senate Agriculture Committee's Bipartisan Farm Bill Strengthens SNAP and Avoids Harming SNAP Households. [Online].

abuse, the recently incarcerated, individuals with disabilities, and homeless individuals.<sup>4</sup> Prioritizing these populations would not only benefit these people individually, but would benefit the families of which they are a part as well. Connecting SNAP E&T participants to the workforce will give these individuals employment opportunities. An additional source of income for a household could be enough to protect a household's food security status. The Senate proposes to create more SNAP E&T participants-to-workforce connections through their proposed provisions.

## Assessing and Improving Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Systems

SNAP is issued through electronic benefit transfer cards (EBT) that are used similarly to debit cards. The Senate Bill plans to improve EBT systems at local retailers, and to address the criticisms of current EBT systems. Such criticism has deemed these systems as being unreliable, providing poor customer service and not being able to keep pace with the retail environment and emerging technology.<sup>5</sup> One of the Senate's provisions include the clarification that companies involved with EBT transactions may not charge any fees related to the transaction itself.<sup>6</sup> SNAP participants should not have to pay money to use their benefits. Another provision enables authorized SNAP vendors to accept SNAP benefits as a form of payment at multiple locations. This would create more options at which SNAP participants could use their benefits, and would in turn increase the convenience of SNAP for its participants.

Additionally, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) will be required to study state EBT systems which will create a heightened awareness of the inefficiencies of these systems among the government. This awareness, would, in response, prompt the officials to address these issues. While remaining focused on customer service and improving efficiencies among EBT systems, the USDA will be required to review at least five state EBT systems while paying particular attention to customer service and data quality and protection.<sup>7</sup> These requirements that the Senate Farm Bill intends to impose would help facilitate cooperation among government officials who enact these provisions and members of the USDA to ensure that EBT systems are operating smoothly and efficiently.

The elimination of EBT system inefficiencies would increase the accessibility of using SNAP benefits for all SNAP participants. The process of using SNAP benefits in a transaction will become less time consuming and further enable participants to use their time in more valuable ways. No more time should be spent attempting to navigate the complexities and difficulties of EBT systems.

## Creating National Interstate Data Match to Prevent Duplicate Participation

The Senate Farm Bill would require a nationwide effort to expand upon an enrollment database that can identify and prevent individuals from enrolling in SNAP in more than one state. The National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC) currently works with Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi to share data on their SNAP participants. The Senate bill would require every state to participate in this effort and to contribute to the database. The current statistics on duplicate enrollment is quite low, though, as

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) reported, “an evaluation of the NAC found that fewer than 0.2 percent of SNAP participants were dual participants (i.e., more than 99.8 percent were not).”<sup>8</sup> These findings conclude that dual participation is not a crucial issue at this time. However, to ensure and uphold the integrity of SNAP, states should continue their efforts to track and share data on their participants. But, there must be limits to these efforts, and states should not be able to track their participants to an extent that would compromise SNAP participants’ privacy.

The House Farm Bill proposes that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) should be required to create a database filled with all SNAP participants’ personal information. This information would include data such as participants’ income and Social Security numbers. States would share this data with the USDA each month, and the data itself would be stored indefinitely. SNAP participants’ data security and privacy could all be put at risk with the enactment of the House proposal, and, therefore, should not be allowed.

The Senate calls for a similar effort to create an enrollment database, but, in stark contrast to the House’s proposal, the Senate bill plans to limit the information that the states will provide to the NAC. The shared information would be restricted to only information that is needed to prevent duplicate participation. The Senate Bill would clarify that the shared information would be used no longer than needed to achieve its purpose, and would only be used for the purpose of avoiding dual participation among SNAP participants. As the CBPP notes, “The Senate proposal makes clear that, while preventing dual participation is a priority, states’ procedures should ensure that individuals who aren’t committing fraud don’t lose timely access to food benefits.”<sup>9</sup>

The Senate proposes to maintain SNAP’s integrity by identifying fraud while, simultaneously, protecting SNAP participants’ access to benefits and securing their privacy.

## What Comes Next?

The House Farm Bill still must be defeated. Its reconsideration is by June 22nd, and it is not too late to speak out against the House’s harmful proposals that threaten 2 million Americans’ access to food assistance.

The Senate proposal still must pass through the Senate without any dangerous alterations to SNAP. The Senate Agriculture Committee is likely to bring the bill to the floor before the July 4<sup>th</sup> recess.

To learn more and stay up-to-date on the progress of these Bills, follow us @cdfnewyork on Instagram and Twitter. #SNAPMatters #ProtectSNAP

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<sup>8</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2018). House Agriculture Committee’s Farm Bill Would Increase Food Insecurity and Hardship. [Online].

<sup>9</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2018). Senate Agriculture Committee’s Bipartisan Farm Bill Strengthens SNAP and Avoids Harming SNAP Households. [Online].

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