

Proposed USDA rule for SNAP benefits would impact food assistance for some Delawareans

By SARAH MUELLER · JUL 23, 2019



• *Food Bank of Delaware CEO Patricia Beebe gives Gov. John Carney a tour of its Newark facility*

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture is proposing new rules preventing states like Delaware from offering food assistance to people making higher incomes.

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Delaware and more than 40 states use what's called "broad based categorical eligibility" to qualify people for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

It allows Delaware to offer food stamps to people who earn up to 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines. It also allows people who get government cash assistance to automatically qualify for SNAP.

Food Bank of Delaware CEO Patricia Beebe said many families are food insecure because of outsized expenses like daycare and housing. About 150,000 Delawareans are on food assistance.

"People don't talk about a living wage," she said. "What it costs to raise a family in Kent County, versus what it costs to raise a family if you live in New Castle County, versus what it costs to raise a family if you're in Sussex County."

The USDA wants to move all SNAP income limit eligibility back to 130 percent of poverty guidelines and curtail automatic eligibility. To confer automatic eligibility for SNAP under the proposal, a household must receive TANF-funded cash or non-cash benefits valued at a minimum of \$50 per month for at least 6 months. In addition, non-cash benefits that could convey automatic eligibility would be restricted to subsidized employment, work supports, or childcare.

The proposed rule will also require school children to reapply for free school lunches. Beebe said proper nutrition helps kids pay attention in class.

"A child going to school is a better learner, attends more regularly and has fewer behavior problems if they're well fed," she said. "And when we talk

about adults, we're also talking about them and their ability to feed their children."

Critics say the proposed rule would penalize families, seniors, and people with disabilities.

"Instead of punishing working families if they work more hours or penalizing seniors and people with disabilities who save for emergencies, the President should seek to assist them with policies that help them afford the basics and save for the future," said Stacy Dean, Vice President of Food Assistance Policy for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Gov. John Carney said it's important to keep the state's SNAP program strong.

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue said food stamps should be for those who most need them.

"For too long, this loophole has been used to effectively bypass important eligibility guidelines. Too often, states have misused this flexibility without restraint," he said. "That is why we are changing the rules, preventing abuse of a critical safety net system, so those who need food assistance the most are the only ones who receive it."

The Foundation for Government Accountability, a conservative think tank, found in 2018 that rolling back eligibility would pull about 23,000 Delawareans off of food stamps.

The USDA acknowledges the proposed rule could increase food insecurity in the U.S. It estimates 3.1 million people nationwide will lose benefits.

Congress rejected this proposal in the 2018 Farm Bill.