



April 2, 2019

Certification Policy Branch
Program Development Division
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

RE: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (RIN 0584-AE57)

To the Certification Policy Branch:

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed rulemaking regarding requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).¹ The Colorado Health Foundation is the state's largest private foundation and the third largest health foundation in the nation. We work closely with partners in the private, public and nonprofit sectors to bring health within reach for all Coloradans. Ensuring access to affordable, healthy food and promoting food security is a critical component of this vision. Given the vulnerability of the ABAWD population, the removal of state discretion and flexibility, and the negative economic impact of the rule, we encourage the Department not to move forward with this proposal.

Nearly one in eleven (9.2 percent) Coloradans struggle to put food on the table, including many able-bodied, working adults who may be struggling due to a job loss, lack of available full-time hours or minimum-wage pay.² In 2016, an estimated 41,000 SNAP enrollees in Colorado fell into the ABAWD category, making them subject to the harsh time limit on benefits under existing law.³ Most ABAWDs who can work do so; however, the Colorado Department of Human Services has observed that this population faces significant challenges in finding and maintaining employment, such as: (1) lack of a high school diploma or its equivalent; (2) no significant/relevant work history; (3) felony convictions; (4) substance abuse; (5) mental and physical health problems; (6) housing problems; and (7) transportation problems.⁴

A recent analysis by Mathematica Policy Research reveals that a greater share of ABAWD SNAP participants live in poverty nationally compared to other SNAP participants, and often at a deeper level of poverty – at or

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/02/01/2018-28059/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-requirements-for-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents>

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/90023/err-256.pdf?v=0>

³ http://coemploymentfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Colorado-SNAP-E_T-State-Plan-FFY17.pdf

⁴ <http://coemploymentfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FY18-CDHS-EF-SP-Revised--11.27.17--Final.pdf>

below 50 percent of the federal poverty guideline.⁵ Additionally, nearly 44 percent of ABAWDs are either under the age of 21 or over the age of 40. This group includes young adults that have recently transitioned out of foster care, veterans and those facing homelessness.

SNAP is not only a boost to ABAWDs and other low-income households, but also benefits the U.S. economy by generating between \$1.22 and \$1.79 in economic activity for every SNAP dollar spent.⁶ Based on this multiplier effect, the Center for American Progress estimates that this proposed rule could shrink U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by nearly \$18.3 billion, resulting in a loss of 178,000 jobs.⁷ This estimate is based on the Department's own assumptions that the rule would eliminate 755,000 ABAWDs from the program and shrink spending by \$15 billion over ten years.

When the ABAWD time limit was put in place, Congress granted states two waiver authorities to exempt these vulnerable individuals from the loss of benefits. Geographic waivers and 15 percent individual caseload exemptions – recently lowered to 12 percent – allow states the flexibility needed to assist residents living in areas with a lack of job opportunities or those facing the challenging individual circumstances discussed above. Congress recently reaffirmed its commitment to these state flexibilities when it rejected similar changes proposed during the reauthorization of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Prior to proposing this rule, USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue indicated that the Department did not have the authority to reject or alter state ABAWD waiver requests without a statutory change made by Congress.⁸ The finalization of this rule would go against congressional intent and represent an Administrative overreach. We urge the Department not to finalize the rule.

We thank you for your consideration of our comments. If you have any questions, please contact Alexis Weightman, senior policy officer at the Colorado Health Foundation, at aweightman@coloradohealth.org or 303-953-3600.

Sincerely,



Kyle Legleiter
Senior Director of Policy
Colorado Health Foundation

⁵ <https://mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/proposed-changes-to-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-waivers-to-work-related-time>

⁶ <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-facts-snap-strengths.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2019/03/14/466700/trumps-effort-cut-snap-fiat-kill-178000-jobs-next-decade/>

⁸ https://republicans-agriculture.house.gov/uploadedfiles/115-13_-_28728.pdf