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Joint Committee on Administrative,  
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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg  
Before the House Appropriations Committee In Support Of  
**House Bill 698**

**Food Supplement Employment and Training Program – Benefits and Funding**

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

*“As many as 15,000 people in Baltimore could see their food stamp benefits slashed under a new Trump administration rule that tightens eligibility requirements”- Baltimore Sun, 1/23/2020*

Federal food benefits to hundreds of thousands of Americans and tens of thousands of Marylanders will terminate by a Trump Administration regulation changing the qualifications for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the direct harm caused by separating impoverished Marylanders from needed sustenance, including thousands of children, the cuts to SNAP also affect the SNAP Employment and Training Program.

Maryland, with support from the federal government, runs an employment and training program that helps Marylanders feed themselves. According to the program website,

Training programs are free of cost to FSET program participants, run for an average of 12 to 16 weeks, and train participants for employment in industries that include welding, construction, machining, manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, and more. Many FSET employment programs also offer job placement, retention and support services that help program graduates find and keep employment.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Lola Fadulu, *Cities Prepare for the Worst as Trump's Food Stamp Cuts Near*, THE N. Y. TIMES, Jan. 25, 2020; Talia Richman, *Feds to cut up to 15,000 in Baltimore from food stamps; Maryland, other states suing to halt change*, THE BAL. SUN, Jan. 23, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Md. Dep't of Human Services, "Food Supplement and Training Program," <http://dhs.maryland.gov/food-supplement-program/food-supplement-employment-training-program-fset/> (Accessed Feb. 20, 2020).

Thousands of Marylanders will no longer be able to take advantage of this essential program that helps put Marylanders back to work. The rule change means that fewer Marylanders have food to eat and fewer Marylanders have training and support to feed themselves.

House Bill 698 would interrupt the spiraling cycle of poverty by providing adequate employment training opportunities despite the federal government's rule change. HB 698 would mandate that the Governor's Budget includes at least one million dollars for the Food Supplement Employment and Training program. By increasing funding and maintaining eligibility for work training programs, House Bill 698 would ensure that Marylanders can continue to provide for themselves and their families and contribute to their local economy.

I urge this committee give House Bill 698 a favorable report.

# Cities Prepare for the Worst as Trump's Food Stamp Cuts Near

 [nytimes.com/2020/01/25/us/politics/trumps-food-stamp-cuts.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/25/us/politics/trumps-food-stamp-cuts.html)

Lola Fadulu

January 25, 2020

CLEVELAND — Next month, Cuyahoga County, Ohio's second largest, will begin sending letters and fliers, making phone calls and hosting information fairs to alert struggling citizens of a change about to befall them: Come April, able-bodied adults without children may lose their food stamps if they do not find work fast.

A Trump administration rule change, long in the making, is about to become real, and by the administration's own estimates, nearly 700,000 people across the country — 20,000 of them in Ohio, 3,000 alone in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County — will be dropped from the food-stamp rolls.

"That's a fairly big hit for the county, for our population," said Kevin Gowan, the administrator of Cuyahoga Job and Family Services, which oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly (and still popularly) known as food stamps. "We're not happy to do it. It is our job and we will fulfill our job."

To the Trump administration, record low unemployment and steady economic growth mean there is no time like the present to nudge people off federal assistance. Around 40 million people access the food-stamp program each year, nearly 3 million of them able-bodied, without children. Of those 3 million, around 2 million do not work.

"Millions and millions of people don't need food stamps anymore," President Trump declared this week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "They have jobs. They're doing really well."

For Carl Thomas, a 48-year-old with a high school degree, it is not that simple. He spends most of his time holed up at a public library, making use of its internet access to apply for all of the jobs he can find.

Before 2016, when his mother died at age 84 of sepsis, he had spent most of his life caring for her. He has been job hunting ever since her death. Some employers want to see a lengthy work history and a college degree. Some are far away, and he does not have a car.

On the sixth day of every month, Mr. Thomas plans out how he is going to make his \$194 in food assistance stretch. Coupons in hand, he walks or takes the bus to Walmart, Giant Eagle, and Dave's Market to find the lowest prices on meat, vegetables and produce. He is ecstatic when seeded red grapes go on sale.

That lifeline could soon disappear. Able-bodied adults with no children lose their food assistance if they fail to work 80 hours a month for three months in a three-year period unless they live in a state with a waiver. Under the looming changes, waivers from this work requirement, once common, will be

much harder to come by.

Fourteen states, New York City and the District of Columbia have sued the Trump administration to block the new rules from going into effect in April, accusing the administration of doing an illegal end run around Congress.

Cuyahoga County and its urban heart, Cleveland, are preparing for the worst. They will start by conducting two information fairs every month starting in February. They will also call and send mail to people, which “will explicitly tell them the ramifications of noncompliance,” Mr. Gowan said, while stressing that it is time to “achieve self-sufficiency.”

By some accounts, Ohio has yet to recover from the recessions of the early and late 2000s. A healthier job market has not led to significantly higher wages. In 2018, five of Greater Cleveland’s 10 most common jobs — retail sales, food preparation and service, cashiers, waiting tables and janitorial and cleaning work — did not pay enough for people to afford food without assistance, according to Policy Matters Ohio, a liberal research organization.

But even for struggling areas like Cuyahoga County, where the majority of food assistance recipients in Ohio live, the bar will soon be too high for waivers from Washington’s work requirement. Such waivers will only go to “labor market areas” defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and an area’s unemployment rate will have to be both 20 percent above the national unemployment rate over a two-year period and at least 6 percent.

For Cleveland’s poor, such economic thresholds and measurements may feel remote, but in April, their responsibilities under the new system will become very real. People seeking food assistance will have to track their work hours each week and report them by mail, phone or in person.

County officials say they will look for individual exemptions based on physical or mental limitations. Already, applicants for food assistance take part in an initial phone screening, and then an in-person assessment test to determine if they are exempt from work requirements. But Mr. Gowan said only 20 percent of those eligible actually make it in for the assessment.

“In general, people don’t want the government involved in their personal lives,” he said.

Local anti-poverty advocates worry that people who should be exempt from the work requirements will be kicked off the food-stamp rolls anyway. Notifying people of the rule change will be challenging because food-stamp recipients often lack a permanent home address or reliable phone service. Even if they do know of the rule, the paperwork may be confusing, said Rachel Cahill, a Cleveland-based consultant for Cuyahoga Job and Family Services.

People may not work because they lack educational qualifications and transportation to surrounding towns with more employment. They may also face discrimination in the hiring process because of the color of their skin or their gender, Ms. Cahill said.

And struggling people tend to have complications in their lives that would challenge anyone. Mr. Thomas's late mother left behind \$25,000 in medical debt, and her house, where he lives, may be seized to pay it off. He said he will likely end up homeless.

Zhavahna Thompson, 22, has been on and off food stamps for years. Finding a job in Cleveland is difficult, she said. So are food stamps.

"Sometimes I honestly wish I just would have never ever applied for food stamps, because it is very complicated," she said.

Ms. Thompson has worked multiple low-wage jobs, including seasonal work at the Cleveland baseball stadium, where her hours were determined by how long the games went, at a Dollar General, at a Subway, and for Amazon, before getting injured lifting a box and then getting laid off.

Ms. Thompson said she is saddened by the new food stamp rule. "That's how people eat," she said.

The Greater Cleveland Food Bank worries that the rule will move people out of the grocery store and into the food pantry line.

"We know SNAP is the largest defense against hunger," said Tiffany Scruggs, the director of outreach at the food bank. "We know with cuts like these, we can't supplement and make up for the shortfalls."

Feeding America, which the Greater Cleveland Food Bank is part of, estimates that for every meal provided by a food bank, the food-stamps program provides nine. The program kept more than three million people out of poverty in 2018.

And April's rule change may be just the beginning. Two other rules to trim the food-stamp rolls are pending. More than 100,000 more Ohioans could lose benefits under one rule change, according to Mathematica Policy Research in Cambridge, Mass. And 41 percent of Ohio households would see a decrease in their benefits under the other, \$45 a month on average, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal think tank in Washington.

Mr. Thomas spends 24 hours a month answering phones and handling incoming packages at University Settlement, a food pantry in Cleveland that he also relies on when his food assistance runs out. He hopes to find a full-time job soon.

"Not everybody wants to be on government assistance," Mr. Thomas said. "There are people who want to be self-reliant. Sometimes you just need some help, just a little bit to get back on their feet."

# Feds to cut up to 15,000 in Baltimore from food stamps; Maryland, other states suing to halt change

 [baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-pol-snap-rule-changes-20200123-s2owouo3jbhbbi2nt4nn2d6ip4-story.html](https://baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-pol-snap-rule-changes-20200123-s2owouo3jbhbbi2nt4nn2d6ip4-story.html)

By Talia Richman

As many as 15,000 people in Baltimore could see their food stamp benefits slashed under a new Trump administration rule that tightens eligibility requirements.

Maryland recently joined more than a dozen states in suing to block the U.S. Department of Agriculture from moving forward with the cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. But should the rule go into effect as planned this spring, it would have a devastating impact on Baltimore's economy and the health of its residents, city officials wrote in a declaration of support for the plaintiffs' request for a preliminary injunction.

"By cutting SNAP benefits for thousands of the most vulnerable members of our community," wrote Baltimore's Food Policy Director Holly Freishtat, the change "will predictably result in a sicker and poorer state population."

The Trump administration's rule, finalized last month, would make it harder for states to waive some requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents who live in economically distressed areas.

Under current rules, such adults 18 to 49 years old who work less than 20 hours a week can receive only three months of food stamp benefits during a three-year period. But for areas with high rates of unemployment or a demonstrable lack of sufficient jobs, states can seek waivers of the time limit on benefits.

Historically such waivers have been granted to Baltimore City where, as of October, the average 24-month unemployment rate was 5.6% — significantly higher than the national unemployment rate of 3.8% in the same period.

The new rule imposes stricter criteria states must meet to issue waivers. Under the plan, states can issue waivers only if a local area has an unemployment rate of 6% or higher.

It now also classifies Baltimore City as part of a "labor market area" that includes Columbia and Towson, two wealthier communities. Factoring in their populations "dilutes the reality of unemployment in Baltimore," Freishtat wrote, resulting in a combined unemployment rate of 4%.

As of January 2019, waivers applied to 13 Maryland jurisdictions. All waivers will expire March 31, and none of those 13 areas likely would qualify under the revised regulations, according to the lawsuit filed Jan. 16 in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Roughly 30,000 people in Maryland could be affected. It's one of several changes to the food stamp program the Trump administration has pushed.

In December, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the new rule will help move people "from welfare to work."

"We want to encourage people by giving them a helping hand, but not an infinitely giving hand," he said.

Democratic Mayor Bernard C. "Jack" Young will join other mayors Friday at the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting in Washington to discuss the new food stamp rule.

The federal change "ignores the fact that Baltimore is a poor city," Young said in an interview. "We need all the help we can get to make sure our citizens have access to healthy food."

Not only would an estimated 11,000 to 15,000 people lose food stamps, city officials say, but there would be an immediate economic impact as well. People spend food stamps at Baltimore stores, so the change would result in an annual loss of approximately \$24 million to \$33 million in spending.

"We're going to see this money no longer in our food economy," Freishtat said. "We're going to see an impact on the economy, we're going to see escalating food insecurity for our residents already struggling and we're going to see increased healthcare costs and spending."

Young said it also could lead to increased crime, as desperate people might resort to stealing to get enough food, a point the city made in its Jan. 10 declaration in support of the request that a judge to halt the changes.

The Agriculture Department estimates the change would save roughly \$5.5 billion over five years and cut benefits for about 688,000 food stamp recipients.

The multistate lawsuit filed Jan. 16 argues the rule contradicts Congress' intent for the food stamp program and would result in thousands of people losing essential access to food.

"This rule will cause Marylanders to go hungry," state Attorney General Brian Frosh said in a statement. "It is unnecessary and heartless."

Advocates say the change feeds on misconceptions that the people receiving food stamps are lazy or refuse to work.

Maryland Hunger Solutions Director Michael J. Wilson said many recipients are working but just not getting enough hours or earning enough money to escape poverty. The Trump administration's reasoning, he said, "ignores the reality that many people face."

Many able-bodied people without dependents who live in Baltimore face barriers to employment including addiction, health problems and criminal records. Some are seasonally employed or underemployed, so they don't meet the 20 hours per week requirement.

Chanteuse May, 39, of Baltimore said that on Wednesday alone, she applied to eight jobs. She's been "constantly, constantly, constantly" searching for steady employment ever since a warehouse where she worked suddenly closed in September.

Two months after getting laid off, she started using food stamps. Now, the prospect that she could lose the ability to pay for healthy meals terrifies her.

"It's ridiculous," she said of the rule change. "You want to take away from those who are trying."

*The Associated Press contributed to this article.*