



April 2, 2019

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

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

Dear Certification Policy Branch:

The National Association of County Human Services Administrators (NACHSA) wishes to comment on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) (RIN 0584-AE57) regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) requirements and services for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs).

We urge USDA to withdraw the NPRM.

An affiliate of the National Association of Counties (NACo), NACHSA represents county directors of human services programs. In ten of those states, NACHSA members administer and their county government assists in administering SNAP on behalf of the state. Nearly one-third of all SNAP recipients reside in those states.

Overall Comments

County directors view SNAP as the foundational national program to reduce food insecurity. As individuals and families enter the program, county staff work to transition them back into the workforce. Given the current eligibility restrictions, counties are well-aware of the importance of moving ABAWD clients who are able to do so into gainful employment as soon as possible. As they work with those individuals, the assistance provided under SNAP is essential to reducing food insecurity. Without that assistance, it becomes more difficult for individuals to pursue employment.

SNAP works as intended. During the great recession in the late 2000's, enrollment in the program increased as more families became eligible. As the economy recovered, millions found work and left SNAP. SNAP's appropriations has decreased accordingly.

The ABAWD program is no different. Fewer individuals qualify, given the economic recovery. Yet, despite the economic improvements, USDA itself notes that the proposed rule could cause 755,000 individuals to lose SNAP benefits, with over \$15 billion in nutrition assistance withdrawn over the next ten years.

Eligibility for SNAP assistance is already restricted greatly for childless unemployed and underemployed adults between the ages of 18 to 49 (with certain exemptions) to three months out of every three years unless they work an average of 20 hours per week. Increased food insecurity caused by the proposed rule will require counties and charitable entities, including food banks, to fill in the gaps. Notably, the proposed rule is silent on whether there would be any improvements in health or employment among these individuals. Responding to unemployment in our communities remains a local issue best addressed when federal and state governments continue the existing partnerships with counties to address their residents' needs.

NACHSA also notes that Congress had the opportunity to address ABAWD waivers legislatively during the drafting of the 2018 bipartisan farm bill. The House and Senate chose to maintain the structure of the current waiver authority and increase funding for SNAP Employment and Training programs to provide additional opportunities for ABAWD's and other SNAP participants. The NPRM ignores those bipartisan actions.

Our specific comments follow.

Maintain Current State and County Administrative Flexibility and Waiver Continuity

NACHSA opposes the proposal to reduce drastically the number of exemptions accumulated from past years that counties and states use to extend employment and training opportunities to ABAWDs when those opportunities become available. Employment opportunities are not necessarily available immediately, especially in rural counties.

NACSHA also opposes the proposal to limit waivers to one year and the initiation of them only after USDA processes the request. If implemented, these administrative actions do not provide states and counties with the ability to thoughtfully plan and respond immediately to the needs of individuals in high unemployment areas.

The Proposal Harms Single Parents and Their Children

The proposed rule will have a disproportionate effect on Non-Custodial Parents (NCP) who are often in poverty or have low incomes and depend on SNAP assistance. Without SNAP, their ability to feed themselves - while also providing a modicum of financial support to their child - would be jeopardized. About 2.1 million NCPs lived below the poverty line in 2015, and 1.5 million accessed SNAP to supplement their resources to afford child support payments. According to the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, child support accounts for about half the average income of low-income parents who receive it, lifting 3/4 million people out of poverty in 2016. Some 4.5 million poor and low-income custodial parents who rely on child support payments from NCPs also utilize SNAP to put food on the table for their children.

County human services administrators are also cognizant of the often tenuous financial circumstances of grandparents raising their grandchildren and of young adults who have exited the foster care system. Limiting county flexibility in ensuring that SNAP is available to those special populations could further de-stabilize their economic situation.

Increase Employment and Training Funding and County Waiver Opportunities

Rather than disallowing or further restricting ABAWD waivers, USDA should work with states and counties to enhance the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program. County economies and labor force markets vary within a state. Because of those dynamics, states should continue to have the ability to request sub-state waivers to address local needs.

Additionally, if a state chooses not to apply for a waiver, USDA should consider allowing counties experiencing high unemployment to apply directly for a waiver in order to meet their communities' needs.

Match ABAWD Work Requirements with Job Realities

The current ABAWD work requirements do not always align with job opportunities available to them. An ABAWD's first job is often part-time and on an 'as-needed' basis. Consequently, individual may not be able to meet the 20 hours per week requirement if the employer does not require that number of hours of work from them to meet the needs of their business. That 20 hour requirement is compounded if the ABAWD falls short of meeting the 80 hours required in a given month. Under the current, inflexible rules, the entire month is counted against their three-year window.

Matching jobs with an ABAWD's skill set is just one factor toward achieving self-sufficiency. Public transportation or a reliable car and affordable housing are among the other pressures faced by our clients. Those factors and lack of transitional supports can make it challenging for ABAWDs to consistently meet the stringent requirements. Moreover, as ABAWDs become employed, SNAP benefits after the ninety day period would help transition them to financial independence. Such support not only helps the individual to stabilize their current employment but also assists the employer and the community long term.

NACHSA's human services directors are ready to work with the USDA improve the SNAP program so that it supports all eligible individuals and families and moves them into gainful employment whenever possible. The proposed rule is contrary to that goal and should be withdrawn.

Sincerely,



Cathy Senderling-McDonald
President, National Association of County Human Services Administrators
Deputy Executive Director, County Welfare Directors Association of California