



Jewish Federation
OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS

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Cutting off food stamps in Louisiana would leave thousands hungry | Opinion

It can be hard to remember what poverty in America looked like before the federal food assistance programs we have today. Reports from the 1920s and '30s reveal a high incidence of malnutrition-related diseases in the American South: a mass of poor people stricken with the sores and dementia of pellagra and the bone deformations of rickets.

In the 1960s, before the reforms that led to the modern system of government food assistance, the nation was scandalized by reports of children in the Mississippi Delta unable to stand for lack of food and by footage of infants dying of malnutrition broadcast on the evening news. In 1969, President Richard Nixon wrote to Congress voicing his concern about the state of hunger in America: “that hunger and malnutrition should persist in a land such as ours,” he wrote, “is embarrassing and intolerable.”

While much has changed since Congress authorized the nationwide expansion of the modern food stamp program in 1974, that program—now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program, or SNAP—remains a powerfully effective tool for reducing hunger in America and for lifting millions of people, particularly children and the elderly, out of poverty. The state of Louisiana is now poised to eliminate that tool.

Due to a funding shortfall within the state budget approved in the last special legislative session, the Department of Children and Family Services has said it will stop participating in SNAP in 2019, unable to afford the state’s share of the program’s administrative costs. No state has taken this step before, and there are good reasons why. Opting out of SNAP would be disastrous for the nearly 900,000 people—about 20 percent of all Louisianans—who receive SNAP benefits. It would also have devastating effects on the economies of our state’s poorest parishes.

Because SNAP benefits reach people in great need, they are spent nearly immediately. For this reason, Moody's Analytics estimates that every SNAP dollar distributed yields \$1.70 in economic activity. In fiscal year 2016, the most recent year for which data is available, Louisiana residents received \$1.5 billion in federal aid through the SNAP program. That means that in 2016, SNAP contributed over \$2.5 billion to our state's economy, with much of that money going directly to the parts of our state with the highest concentrations of people living in poverty.

Louisiana opting out of SNAP would not only place a cruel economic burden on the citizens least equipped to support it, it would also make no economic sense. Since the state is only responsible for roughly half of the program's administrative costs, opting out of SNAP would mean voluntarily foregoing billions of dollars of economic activity in order to trim roughly \$34 million from the state budget.

SNAP is an essential program. It helps put food on the table for hundreds of thousands of Louisiana residents, and lifts more than 100,000 children out of poverty every year. As our colleagues at MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger recently reminded us: "Jewish text and tradition compel us to honor the dignity of every person, especially those who are struggling. No matter a person's circumstance, no one deserves to be hungry." To remove this vital support from our state's citizens would be just as embarrassing and intolerable as was our nation's failure to address persistent hunger decades ago.

We call on our state legislators to raise the revenue necessary to preserve SNAP in Louisiana.

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