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### Template Instructions

Attached is a template to help you draft your own comments regarding the impact of the proposed rule, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents,” on young adults. This template comment letter was developed by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP).

Your comment in opposition to the proposed rule matters. If finalized, the proposed rule would limit struggling workers’, including young adults, access to critical food assistance, making it less likely for people to succeed in work and life. Submitting comments can raise the profile of an issue and show policymakers that their proposal is widely unpopular. Also, a high quality and high volume of comments can also delay publication of a proposed rule since the administration is required to review and respond to each unique comment.

Comments should be submitted online at:

<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FNS-2018-0004-5999>. Click on “Comment now” and either enter your comment in the text box (must be fewer than 5000 characters) or upload your comment as a PDF.

As you are drafting your comment, here are some important tips to keep in mind:

- Our friends at FRAC suggest you modify the language provided in the template so that at least one-third of it reflects your own thoughts and experiences. This will ensure that each submitted comment counts as a unique comment. USDA staff must code and organize all comments, and the process is very different if they have to pause and consider what is similar and what is different in each comment, as opposed to just counting the number of commenters saying the same thing.
- Please feel free to utilize any portion of the template that is relevant to your organization or institution and cut and paste as you wish; there is no need to cite this document.
- This template provides several key reasons why the proposal should be withdrawn—in order to avoid duplication, you might consider choosing one or two of the sections to concentrate on and individualize, rather than address all of the sections in your comment.

If you have questions about the proposed rule or campaign, please contact please contact Robert Campbell ([rcampbell@feedingamerica.org](mailto:rcampbell@feedingamerica.org)); Ellen Vollinger ([evollinger@frac.org](mailto:evollinger@frac.org)); or Zahra Mion ([zmion@americanprogress.org](mailto:zmion@americanprogress.org)).

If you have questions about this template, please contact Renato Rocha ([rrocha@clasp.org](mailto:rrocha@clasp.org)).

<Insert Date>

*Submitted via [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov)*

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:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on USDA's proposed rule, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs)." My organization, <insert name here>, is deeply concerned by attempts to further limit food assistance for the individuals we serve in our state and community. We strongly support the goal of helping SNAP participants obtain and keep quality jobs that enable them to achieve economic security. However, many who seek opportunities to meet SNAP time limit rules may not be able to find a job, and the proposal does not require states to offer people a work or education and training placement that would meet work reporting requirements. We believe the restrictions suggested in the proposed rule would result in large numbers of struggling workers, including young adults, losing access to SNAP nutrition assistance, becoming increasingly food insecure, and losing the resilience necessary to seek work or advance their careers.

The proposed rule will make young SNAP recipients less, rather than more, capable of becoming economically secure and will make the economy weaker. As an organization <that serves young adults>, we submit the following comment to provide insight on the continuing challenges young workers face in our economy and oppose the proposed rule. <Insert language describing your organization, its mission, and your knowledge of young adults seeking work or working in jobs paying low wages>.

## **1. Background**

SNAP is our nation's most important anti-hunger program. It provides food assistance to youth, working families, people with disabilities, seniors, and many more. SNAP helps approximately 39 million people in nearly 20 million households put food on the table.<sup>1</sup>

However, federal law currently limits non-disabled adults ages 18-49 without dependent children to just 3 months of SNAP in a 36-month period unless they engage in work or work-related activities at least half time.<sup>2</sup> The current rule is harsh and unfair. When several states re-instated this time limit in 2016 after suspending it due to the Great Recession, at least 500,000 people lost SNAP benefits.<sup>3</sup> Many more geographic regions will now be required to reinstate the time limit if the proposed rule goes into effect. Time limits harm vulnerable people by denying them food benefits at a time when they most need it.

While people subject to the time limit are a demographically diverse population in terms of race, education, and geography, young adults account for a considerable share of the population. Nearly half (47 percent) of the individuals subject to the time limit are ages 18 to 29. Approximately 85 percent have at most a high school diploma or equivalent. Approximately 45 percent of the people subject to the time limit are women and, among those who report race, an estimated 48 percent are White, 35 percent are Black, and 13 percent are Hispanic.<sup>4</sup> People subject to the time limit face particular employment challenges, including a lack of reliable transportation, unstable housing arrangements, engagement with the criminal justice system, unstable work histories, or undiagnosed physical or mental limitations.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. Proposed Rule Would Limit Critical Food Assistance for Low-Income Youth and Young Adults**

### *Proposal Does Not Reflect the Realities of Our Economy*

The proposed rule would have a disparate impact on youth and youth of color, given the considerable barriers they face in entering the labor market and maintaining employment. Nationwide, approximately 4.6 million young adults ages 16 to 24 are out of school and

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, "SNAP Participation," Food and Nutrition Service, September 2018, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/pd/34SNAPmonthly.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Unemployed Adults Without Children Who Need Help Buying Food Only Get SNAP For Three Months," <https://www.cbpp.org/unemployed-adults-without-children-who-need-help-buying-food-only-get-snap-for-three-months>.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Bolen, Dottie Rosenbaum, Stacy Dean, et al., *More Than 500,000 Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016 as Waivers Expire*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 2016, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-than-500000-adults-will-lose-snap-benefits-in-2016-as-waivers-expire>.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Carlson, Dorothy Rosenbaum, and Brynne Keith-Jennings, *Who Are the Low-Income Childless Adults Facing the Loss of SNAP in 2016?*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 2016, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/who-are-the-low-income-childless-adults-facing-the-loss-of-snap-in-2016>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

unemployed.<sup>6</sup> In 2018, the youth unemployment rate (9.2%) was more than double the overall unemployment rate of 3.9 percent.<sup>7</sup> Among youth, Black (16.5 percent) and Latino (10.8 percent) young adults have considerably higher rates of unemployment.<sup>8</sup> <Include specific state or local examples or data.>

Even when employed, young adults are more likely than older workers to have jobs with low wages and no benefits.<sup>9</sup> Some struggle to receive enough hours from their employer to make ends meet. A report from the Economic Policy Institute found that 6.1 million workers were involuntary part-time; they preferred to work full-time but were only offered part-time hours. According to the report, “involuntary part-time work is increasing almost five times faster than part-time work and about 18 times faster than all work.” Young workers 16 to 24 years of age are more likely to be working part-time involuntarily among all age groups and account for approximately 28 percent of all involuntary part time workers, despite comprising 13 percent of those at work.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, young adult workers are more likely to experience fluctuating work hours common to youth-hiring sectors such as retail, restaurants, agriculture, construction, and other services. For example, approximately 90 percent of young food service workers reported that their hours fluctuated in the last month by 68 percent, on average. In addition, half of retail workers reported that they know their work schedule one week or less in advance, and half of janitors and housekeepers reported that their employer completely controls the timing of their work.<sup>11</sup>

Young adults in these jobs use SNAP to help them cover basic needs, but many youths will lose SNAP under the proposed rule when their hours fall below 20 hours per week. The proposed rule penalizes young adults who struggle to find stable employment by increasing food insecurity.

<Include any testimonials or stories of the barriers faced by youth seeking work or working in low-wage, low-quality jobs in your community.>

### *Proposed Rule Undermines Safety Net and Should Be Rejected*

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Burd-Sharps and Kristen Lewis, *More than a Million Reasons for Hope Youth Disconnection in America Today*, Measure of America, March 2018, <http://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2018/>.

<sup>7</sup> Table 2. *Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population 16 to 24 Years of Age by Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, July 2015-2018*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed March 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/youth.t02.htm>; *Household Data Annual Averages: 1. Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population, 1948 to Date*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed March 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat01.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Alleviating Poverty for Opportunity Youth*, JFF, December 2018, <https://www.jff.org/resources/alleviating-poverty-opportunity-youth/>.

<sup>10</sup> Lonnie Golden, *Still Falling Short on Hours and Pay*, Economic Policy Institute, December 2016, <http://www.epi.org/publication/still-falling-short-on-hours-and-pay-part-time-work-becoming-new-normal/>.

<sup>11</sup> Susan J. Lambert, Peter J. Fugiel, and Julia R. Henly, *Schedule Unpredictability Among Early Career Workers in the US Labor Market: A National Snapshot*, University of Chicago: Employment Instability, Family Well-being, and Social Policy Network, August 2014, [http://www.academia.edu/21504026/Schedule\\_Unpredictability\\_among\\_Early\\_Career\\_Workers\\_in\\_the\\_US\\_Labor\\_Market\\_A\\_National\\_Snapshot](http://www.academia.edu/21504026/Schedule_Unpredictability_among_Early_Career_Workers_in_the_US_Labor_Market_A_National_Snapshot).

The proposed rule would expose more youth to an arbitrary food cutoff policy by limiting state flexibility regarding area waivers and individual exemptions. By the Administration's own calculations, the proposed rule would take food away from 755,000 to 851,000 low-income people in the U.S by 2020, with numbers increasing each year thereafter.

The rule would make it harder for areas with elevated unemployment rates to qualify for waivers, by adding a 7 percent unemployment rate floor as one condition for waiver qualification. The rule would also restrict the geographic flexibility of states' waiver requests, as they would no longer be able to obtain waivers of the time limit for an entire state, a group of counties defined by the state, or a portion of a county. States could only request waivers for individual counties or federally-designated Labor Market Areas, and could not use Workforce Development Board areas. This could mean that time limits would take effect in only one county in a larger workforce area, or in central cities with high unemployment rates that are part of counties with lower unemployment rates. <Add any examples or details about how these proposals would affect your state, or a region in your state. Describe any areas in the state that might have unemployment rates under 7 percent even though young adults sustain higher unemployment rates and struggle to find jobs. >

The Department provides no analysis to explain its conclusions about the impacts the changes would have on individuals and population groups nor offers realistic plans to avert harm from those changes. In fact, the only justification that USDA offers for not adopting a lower threshold is that "too few individuals" would be subject to the requirements. The rule seems arbitrary and devised to produce the desired result of more people being subject to the time limit. We oppose the use of a floor.

### **3. Proposal Does Not Improve Employment Outcomes – and Would Undermine Investments in Programs that Do**

#### *Time Limits and Work Reporting Requirements Do Not Encourage Employment*

Unlike work reporting requirements in most public assistance programs, SNAP time limit rules do not require states to offer options for meeting work reporting requirements before cutting people off benefits. Historically, many states have chosen not to help people subject to the time limit find qualifying work or training activities.<sup>12</sup> Many young adults will lose SNAP if they cannot find a qualifying activity – which does not include job search – on their own.

SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) offers some qualifying activities and is in early stages of expansion in many areas of the country. Some state and local leaders in the adult/postsecondary education and youth workforce development sectors have worked hard over the past decade to intentionally engage SNAP youth in high-quality programs and develop partnerships for SNAP Employment and Training (E&T). However, this investment in high-quality, high-intensity

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<sup>12</sup> Nune Phillips, *SNAP and Work*, Center for Law and Social Policy, January 2018, [https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/01/2018\\_snapandwork.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/01/2018_snapandwork.pdf).

programs will likely shift backward as some states spread limited SNAP E&T resources thinly to help more people meet SNAP time limit rules. The resulting low-intensity SNAP E&T programs have proven to be ineffective in moving SNAP recipients into jobs that will allow them to achieve economic security. Regardless of the quality of programming, most states lack adequate funding to offer SNAP E&T at scale. It is therefore commonly expected that a large number of people subject to the time limit will lose their SNAP benefits, and fewer SNAP funds will be injected into the economy.

If SNAP recipients do manage to find low-wage jobs to meet work reporting requirements, they do not fare any better in the long run than those in low-intensity SNAP E&T programs. Lessons learned from TANF, SNAP, and other programs demonstrate that work reporting requirements are not effective in connecting people to living-wage jobs.<sup>13</sup> As laid out by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in a review of rigorous evaluations, research shows that employment increases among individuals subject to work reporting requirements were modest and faded over time. In nearly all of the approximately dozen programs evaluated, employment among recipients *not* subject to work reporting requirements was the same as or higher than employment among individuals subject to work reporting requirements within five years.<sup>14</sup>

Work reporting requirements are not only ineffectual, but have opportunity costs: the time that a SNAP recipient loses in low-intensity programs or low-wage jobs simply to meet requirements could have been spent obtaining skills and credentials, finding a quality job, and increasing their earnings.

A much better focus for public policy is to invest in strategies that support young people to develop skills and access training that prepares them for jobs that pay living wages, and foster an economy that creates more quality jobs with fair wages. <Include descriptions and testimonials of barriers to employment and support services that would increase the success of obtaining and maintaining work with livable wages. If you have state-specific examples or data, it would be helpful to include.>

### *Proposal Would Disproportionately Harm Youth and Protected Groups*

We strongly oppose the proposed rule due to its disproportionate impact on youth and protected classes including women, communities of color, and people with disabilities. The proposed rule would have a particularly negative impact on young adults, who have much higher unemployment rates than the general population and represent a disproportionate percentage of SNAP recipients subject to time limits. <Make the case that the proposal would have a negative impact in your state. Note any challenges –such as lack of transportation or a lack of education – that some young adults have in finding work.>

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<sup>13</sup> Ladonna Pavetti, *Work Requirements Don't Cut Poverty, Evidence Shows*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 2016, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/work-requirements-dont-cut-poverty-evidence-shows>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

The Department notes that while the proposed changes “have the potential for disparately impacting certain protected groups due to factors affecting rates of employment of these groups, [it] find[s] that implementation of mitigation strategies and monitoring by the Civil Rights Division of FNS will lessen these impacts.” But no explanation of the mitigation strategies and monitoring is provided, and we do not believe that mitigation strategies can be significant enough to fully address the disproportionate impact of increased food insecurity and poverty on protected classes.

### *Rule would weaken the economy as a whole*

SNAP has historically served as an automatic economic stabilizer in changing times. It helps to shorten recessions and dampen the effects of an economic cycle in downturn. Without the mitigating effects of SNAP, the impact of recessions can escalate. The proposed rule inhibits SNAP from rapidly responding to changing economic conditions, and the resulting impact on the economy will affect all job seekers. In addition, the proposed rule projects a loss of at least \$15 billion in SNAP benefits over 10 years. This loss will impact the economy – the USDA's Economic Research Service estimates the multiplier effects from SNAP benefits to be 1.79, which is a significant economic boost. We strongly oppose any changes that dilute the impact of SNAP benefits as an automatic stabilizer.

### **Conclusion**

The Administration proposed rule seeks to end run around Congress, which just concluded a review and reauthorization of SNAP in the 2018 Farm Bill and did not make the changes proposed. The rules governing areas’ eligibility for waivers and individual exemptions have been in place for nearly 20 years. In that time, the waiver rules have proven to be reasonable, transparent, and manageable for states to operationalize.

For these reasons described in this comment letter, the Department should immediately withdraw its current proposal. Please feel free to contact <name, email> to provide further information.

<Add to or substitute your conclusion or priorities as they relate to low-income people and/or SNAP participants>

Sincerely,

<insert name>