Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in WV
Do work requirements improve food security?
WV FOODLINK Policy Research Brief

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest and most important federal food assistance program in the United States. 1 in 5 West Virginia residents depend on this vital program. 1 in 3 children depend on SNAP. Although SNAP is key to food security in our state, WV receives less than 1% of the U.S. SNAP budget.

In 2017, SNAP contributed a direct investment of $497 million in federal funds in the food retail sector with a total indirect economic impact of an estimated $844 million.

In 2016, DHHR implemented work-requirements in a pilot program among the 9 counties with the lowest unemployment rates. In an analysis of DHHR records and our own food banking survey for those counties WV FOODLINK found that:

- 12,379 adult recipients were reduced from the SNAP roles from 2015-2017
- 64% of all reductions of adult recipients in WV were from the 9 pilot counties
- Only 5% of ABAWDs referred by DHHR actually gained employment in 2016
- Cost WV Govt an estimated $800,000 and Saved WV DHHR $0
- Resulted in a loss of at least $13 million in federal subsidies to participating food retailers
- Resulted in a negative indirect economic impact of $22.4 million in 2017
- Increased the burden on food charities to address hunger:
  - 7,104 more visits to food pantries from 2015-2017 = 29% increase in need
  - 36,183 more visits to hot meal programs from 2015-2017 = 121% increase in need

WV FOODLINK is a research program of the WVU Food Justice Laboratory. We conduct long-term research on healthy food access in West Virginia and assess strategies that reduce hunger and ensure food security. Given our expertise and research in the areas of individual, household and community food security we have been asked by policy makers to consider the impacts of expanding work requirements to all 55 counties and asset testing on the status of current SNAP recipients as proposed in HR 4001.
How will the implementation of work-requirements impact food security in the remaining 46 counties in WV?

Unemployment rates in the remaining 46 counties in West Virginia continue to be high, thus qualifying much of West Virginia for a waiver from the USDA. Indeed, in 2017 unemployment rates continued to rise across West Virginia, which is alarming and counter to the national trend.

33 counties have unemployment rates above 6%
22 counties have unemployment rates above 8%

Based upon the results of the 9 county pilot in 2016 and our ongoing research with food assistance agencies across the state, WVFOODLINK estimates the following impacts associated with implementation of work-requirements in the remaining counties in West Virginia:

- DHHR could reduce an additional 7,310 or more adult recipients from SNAP by 2018
- DHHR could referrals to E&T programs however only 135 ABAWD gain employment
- Cost WV Govt at least an additional $800,000+ and will Save WV DHHR $0
- Result in a loss of additional $17.8 million in federal subsidies food retailers in 2018
- Result in a negative indirect economic impact of $30.3 million in 2018
- Increase the Burden on Food Charities to address hunger:
  - 20,468 more visits to food pantries from 2017-2019 = 29% increase in need
  - 75,263 more visits to hot meal programs from 2017-2019 = 121% increase in need

Charitable food agencies such as food banks, churches and community groups are already stretched thin with growing demand for assistance from food insecure individuals, households and communities. Increasing work-requirements without expanding job opportunities across West Virginia is likely to increase burdens on our most vulnerable citizens.

For further information or questions contact:
Dr. Bradley Wilson, Director of the Food Justice Lab
brwilson@mail.wvu.edu