

April 2018

**Re: Opposition to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) waiver limitations and mandatory work requirements (H.B. 1659)**

Dear Representatives:

The anti-hunger organizations listed below ask you to oppose House Bill 1659. This bill would make it harder for struggling Pennsylvanians to put food on the table, cost state taxpayers millions of dollars in new red tape, and save no state money. Beyond direct harm to those who will face increased hunger, the bill would cost jobs, as our supermarkets and farmers would lose hundreds of millions in 100% federally-funded SNAP dollars that are spent on their products. H.B. 1659 is unnecessary and harmful, and we urge you to oppose it.

The bill would do three things: First, it would prevent the Governor from seeking geographic waivers from the three-month SNAP time limit for childless adults aged 18-49 who are not disabled, in areas of high unemployment. HB 1659 would force the state to cut off SNAP for people who are trying their best to get a job but cannot find one, perhaps because of transportation difficulties, limited education, undiagnosed disabilities, a criminal record, or opioid addiction. It would also cause workers whose employers do not regularly schedule them for 20 hours per week – even if they are willing to work more – to lose access to SNAP. Cutting off these Pennsylvanians' food will not help them get a job faster, or increase hours or wages for underemployed workers. Instead, it will increase hunger, harm health, and force those already struggling to focus on securing basic nutrition. What they truly need is a stronger economy or help with barriers to employment.

Second, HB 1659 would impose work requirements on all non-disabled adults receiving SNAP – including parents. While federal rules require work of childless adults, this bill expands the rule so that children, too, may lose access to basic nutrition if their parent(s) are unable to find employment quickly enough or secure sufficient hours of work. Sanctions would cause parents to lose benefits that feed their children.

Third, these new work rules would require creation of a huge new state bureaucracy to monitor hours of work and to impose sanctions for non-compliance. Millions of state dollars will be spent on increased red tape and bean counting in order to turn away federally funded benefits that help people eat. This will not only limit the dollars available to investment in skills training and reducing barriers to work, but the increased bureaucracy devoted to monitoring work hours will divert from staff time dedicated to assisting seniors, those with disabilities, and workers who rely on the county assistance offices to smoothly process SNAP and other crucial benefits.

Most people on SNAP who are capable of working do work. More than half of SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult work while receiving SNAP — and more than 80 percent work in the year before or after receiving SNAP. The rates are even higher for families with children: more than 60 percent work while receiving SNAP, and almost 90 percent work in the prior or subsequent year. The SNAP program encourages work by gradually

tapering off benefits as workers begin to earn more and work their way out of poverty to greater stability. There is no evidence that receipt of SNAP discourages work.

Rather than punishing people who are already facing economic hardship, Pennsylvania should instead focus on policies that help create jobs and boost wages. Adults on SNAP who can work need job opportunities or job training, and help with barriers like transportation and child care. Cutting off their SNAP if they are not working is counterproductive for them and for Pennsylvania.

**SINCERELY,**