



September 17, 2019

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

RE: Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), RIN 0584-AE62

To the Program Design Branch:

The Colorado Health Foundation appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA or Department) proposed rule that would revise the broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) parameters for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).¹ We strongly oppose the proposed changes and urge the Department to withdraw the proposed rule in its entirety.

The Colorado Health Foundation is the state's largest private foundation and the third largest health foundation in the nation. We work closely with partners in the private, public and nonprofit sectors to bring health within reach for all Coloradans. Ensuring equitable access to affordable, healthy food and promoting food security are critical components of this vision.

Nearly one in 11 (9.2%) Coloradans struggle to put food on the table.² As a partner and funder of the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger,³ we know that these programs lead to improved health and educational outcomes, reduce health care costs and help increase local economic activity. The Foundation opposes any policy change that would undo efforts in the state to maximize the enrollment and participation of eligible Coloradans in critical nutrition assistance programs that help keep food on their table.

Currently, BBCE allows states, at their option and design, to streamline the SNAP eligibility and enrollment process for households who also receive benefits from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Colorado and Coloradans have greatly benefited from the flexibility offered under BBCE. Through BBCE, Colorado has expanded SNAP eligibility to families with a gross income limit up to 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, or \$51,500 for a family of four in 2019. Households that qualify for SNAP through BBCE have gross incomes over the federal poverty line, but must have net incomes at or below 100 percent of

¹ See: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/07/24/2019-15670/revision-of-categorical-eligibility-in-the-supplementalnutrition-assistance-program-snap>

² See: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/90023/err-256.pdf?v=0>

³ <https://www.endhungerco.org/>

poverty after high-cost necessities such as housing, childcare and health care expenses are deducted from their gross incomes.

Currently, Colorado serves more than 456,000 individuals through the SNAP program on a yearly basis including impoverished families, children, veterans, and people who are disabled, and/or elderly. Enacting the proposed rule changes would alter Colorado eligibility guidelines and decrease the number of families served through this program each month. The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) has determined that the USDA's proposal would eliminate SNAP benefits from 33,000 individuals each month (17,000 households); 11,000 of these individuals are children and 7,300 are seniors over the age of 60. In unduplicated numbers, it is estimated that more than 90,000 Coloradans per year would lose SNAP eligibility.

CDHS also estimates that the average SNAP benefit for these households is about \$58. Given the common statistic that each dollar spent on SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 in local economic activity, the state of Colorado stands to lose more than \$20 million per year if the USDA's proposal is implemented.

The current version of SNAP categorical eligibility was included in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.⁴ It has been reauthorized multiple times, most recently in the 2018 Farm Bill. An earlier version of the 2018 Farm Bill that passed the House would have limited SNAP categorical eligibility.⁵ This provision was not included in the conference agreement, however, and the 2018 Farm Bill was approved without any changes to categorical eligibility. Since the 2018 Farm Bill did not give the Department the authority to limit categorical eligibility, finalization of this rule would go against Congressional intent.

Given the negative impacts to Coloradans' health and food security discussed above, we encourage the USDA not to move forward with the proposed rule. We thank you for your consideration of our comments. If you have any questions, please contact Alexis Weightman, Colorado Health Foundation senior policy officer, at aweightman@coloradohealth.org or 303-953-3600.

Sincerely,



Kyle Legleiter
Senior Director of Policy
Colorado Health Foundation

⁴ The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Categorical Eligibility, Congressional Research Service, August 1, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42054.pdf>

⁵ <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018-farm-bill-conference-report-analysis.pdf>