

Statement on Most Recent USDA Proposal to Cut SNAP Food Benefits Via The Standard Utility Allowance

If implemented, the third proposed SNAP rule of 2019 could result in \$4.5 billion in cuts to food assistance over five years

October 2, 2019 - Anti-hunger advocates are once again preparing to respond to another round of proposed cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California.

Just one week after the public comment period closed for the [second set](#) of the Trump administration's proposed rule changes to SNAP, which would take food away from approximately three million hungry Americans, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced [another proposed rule change](#). The 60-day period to respond to this third proposed rule will end in December.

SNAP, which is administered by the USDA, is recognized as the nation's most important anti-hunger program. If enacted, these three rules combined are estimated to negatively impact over a million Californians, more than a quarter of the SNAP recipients in our state. What's more, these proposed cuts to SNAP are among the dozens of other safety net cuts targeting low-income families proposed by the Trump administration this year alone.

"The Trump administration's newest proposal will be touted as streamlining and standardizing, but no one should be fooled." said Jessica Bartholow of the Western Center on Law & Poverty and chairperson of the [Lifting Children Out of Poverty Task Force](#) Safety-net Committee. "It's simply another ploy to take food help away from people who turn to SNAP to prevent hunger. This is coming from a President who has never had to wonder where his next meal is coming from or worry about his kids going to bed hungry. It is disgraceful. I'm proud to know that the anti-hunger community and our allies will, once again, show up in force in opposition."

Current law requires the SNAP program to recognize the utility expenses of each SNAP applicant household and adjust the benefits issued based on the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) calculated by the State and approved in the State plan. The current policy allows variances in SUAs to accommodate for differences in utility costs and rates, and allows states flexibility in how they calculate those costs. The proposed changes would standardize those calculations across the country and set the SUA to an amount lower than what would be needed to meet the costs of utilities for many Californians. **Nationwide, the proposed change is estimated to result in cuts to food assistance by \$4.5 billion over a five-year period.**

"It is unconscionable that for the third time this year, the Trump administration is proposing to cut vital food assistance for low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities," said Jared Call of California Food Policy Advocates. "In the wealthiest country in the world, no one should have to go hungry or face the impossible choice between feeding their family and keeping their electricity on and home heated. CFPA and our anti-hunger partners are committed to working together to prevent cuts to SNAP and to insist that our national policy makers renew their commitment to end hunger and food insecurity."

SNAP recipient households have uneven protections from hunger as a result of some states under-calculating the SUA; the only appropriate policy response is to bring those states up-to-par with other states by improving their SUAs. Instead, the administration is proposing a race-to-the-bottom solution by cutting SUAs and removing state flexibility, which will undermine our ability to help low-income Americans in every state prevent hunger and keep their electricity on at the same time. The USDA estimates that 20

percent of the national SNAP caseload will be impacted, though it is unknown what percentage of those impacted live in California.

“California food banks are on the frontlines of hunger and know first-hand the inhumane trade-offs that low-income families make between food and paying for basic needs like high utility bills,” said Andrew Cheyne, Director of Government Affairs for the California Association of Food Banks. “We’ve said it during every proposed cut to SNAP, and we’ll continue to raise awareness during this public comment period, that for every meal the charitable sector provides, SNAP delivers 12. Food banks and our partners cannot make up the difference: if this rule is enacted, people will go hungry just to keep cool during scorching summers and warm in winter.”

Leveling the [SUA amounts across the country](#) down rather than up, despite the [well-documented](#) fact that [benefits for all recipients are currently inadequate](#), means fewer people will be able to afford the food they need to last them through the month. We urge the administration to abandon this proposal and instead join our organizations in supporting [H.R.1368](#) (Adams, D-NC-12) to make SNAP benefits more responsive to our nation’s unacceptable levels of hunger, not less.

The previous two proposed administrative changes received a combined 200,000 comments from food banks, policy advocates, legal services, faith based organizations, unions, business leaders and government officials from across the country. The final rules for those proposals remain pending. Our organizations expect a similarly robust response to this harmful proposal and, if the barrage of comments in opposition to these proposed rules fail to discourage the administration from publishing detrimental final rules, we will take whatever next-steps are necessary to prevent hunger and protect the rights of low-income Californians.

Please also reference statements by our national partners: The Food Research and Action Center, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, and the Center for Law and Social Policy.

For more information about our opposition to this proposed rule, contact us at:

Jessica Bartholow, Western Center on Law & Poverty
Email: jbartholow@wclp.org
Phone: (916) 282-5119

Jared Call, California Food Policy Advocates
Email: jared@cfpa.net
Phone: (510) 560-6485

Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks
Email: andrew@cafoodbanks.org
Phone: 510-350-9915