

Controversy Surrounding SNAP Choices

By Gabrielle Dinardi



SNAP is the United States' Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which seeks to provide financial assistance for low-income individuals throughout the nation. Food stamp programs have been established in the United States since the mid 1960's, when they were said to assist in the agricultural industry in America, as well as spread higher levels of nutritional opportunities to families. The basic requirements for eligibility in

the state of Florida include a maximum income of \$23,760 for a single person household, with an added \$8,320 per additional member of the same household.

In recent times, there has been a noticeably large increase in the controversy surrounding SNAP. Critics argue that providing free food for low-income and unemployed individuals and parents is promoting laziness and rewarding a lack of work ethic. Many conservatives claim that it is unfair to use taxes from the nation's working class to pay for free food to the unemployed. On the other hand, I believe that this program is set in place to assist and encourage individuals and parents who are having a tough time but instead will allow a stepping stone back to the path towards success. Many of the recipients are in fact employed, but still living at poverty level for reasons often outside their own control.

The Trump administration is currently pushing for more regulations to be set on the types of food that can be purchased with the SNAP cards. Under the current regulations, eligible users can choose to purchase any food items including junk food (such as potato chips, cookies, and ice cream), luxury items (such as steak, lobster, etc.) and soft drinks. However, SNAP does not cover alcohol, cigarettes, ready-made food, or non-food items. Under President Trump's proposed changes, eligible recipients would now receive the majority of their benefits in the form of prepackaged boxes including pastas, beans, canned vegetables, and other non-perishable food items.

There has been backlash over this proposal in the fact that it would take important choices away from these families. CEO of *Hunger Free America*, a nonprofit group assisting

low-income families get the help they need, Joel Berg, has been very vocal about the harm that this new proposition will cause by “taking over \$200 billion worth of food from low-income Americans while increasing bureaucracy and reducing choices.” On the other hand, proponents of the changes argue that if the recipients are receiving equivalent amounts of food at a fraction of the previous cost, it should not matter that the element of choice is being forcibly removed.

Another huge issue concerning the potential stricter regulations of the program are that by reducing the choices available will also lead to an increased stigmatization of those participating in the program. By taking away one’s right of choice, it is reducing an adult to the likeliness of a child. When the government makes laws to dictate what a person is and is not allowed to purchase, it increases the stereotypes surrounding users of the program that they are not responsible enough and in turn are often taking advantage of the program.

Many people who sit around and judge others for needing government assistance are often able to do so without any sympathetic experiences themselves. Opponents of the support have never had to wonder where their next meal was coming from, or how they were going to feed their young child. As the old idiom goes, you should never judge a person until you’ve walked a mile in their shoes.

References

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