

Food Stamp Benefits Set to be Cut this November

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Unless the U.S. Congress acts soon, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, (SNAP) or “food stamp,” benefits will be cut for all participants this November. For a family of three, this would likely amount to \$20 to \$25 a month. The reduction will fall especially hard on families with children receiving these benefits, dropping the average SNAP benefits down to about \$1.30 per person per meal from about \$1.50.

Background

Each year, SNAP benefit levels are adjusted to reflect inflation, or deflation, in food prices. In 2009, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act increased the monthly benefits for all SNAP participants to stimulate the economy. Congress did not set an expiration date for the increased benefits. The increased level was supposed to continue until the annual benefit adjustments caught up with it.

However, in August 2010, Congress passed a law that set April 2014 as the expiration date. The estimated savings from lower SNAP spending were reserved to fund education jobs and Medicaid. Four months later, Congress passed another law mandating that the increased benefits expire October 31, 2013. The money saved by this shift was set aside to fund child nutrition programs. The President’s proposed 2014 budget would prevent the November reduction and extend increased benefits through March 2014. The budget is now in Congress’ hands.

How big are the cuts?

Since SNAP benefits are based on figures published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) each July, states and food stamp participants will not know the exact amount of the benefit cut until this summer. According to the most recent figures by the U.S. Congressional Budget Office, the cuts will range from \$1* to \$25 per month depending on family size.

These non-discretionary, across-the-board cuts will be especially difficult for Georgia because of the state’s high levels of families who go hungry. Nearly one in five Georgians is food insecure, or without sufficient access to food. More than one in four children is food insecure. Georgia families receiving food stamps increased by 83 percent between January 2009 and December 2012. Georgia is seventh in the country in its rate of food hardship.

Monthly Cuts in Food Stamps Reduces Monthly Meals for Families



Source: Center on Budget Policy and Priorities. Based on U.S. Congressional Budget Office February 2013 Baseline Projections of Food Price Inflation. Number of meals lost based on average per-person SNAP benefit of about \$1.30

Georgia’s historically high unemployment and poverty rates have left more of the state’s families facing hunger. More than 417,000 Georgians, or 8.6 percent, are unemployed (and 45 percent of them have been out of work for more than 26 weeks). Nearly one in five Georgians, and more than one out of four children, live in poverty, defined as a \$22,891 income for a family of four.

*Households receiving the minimum benefit, \$16 per month, will see benefits cut by \$1 per month.