

## Work Requirements, Time Limits Constrain Food Assistance

By Melissa Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst

In April 2017, the state informed nearly 7,000 Georgians that they will no longer receive help putting food on the table from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly called food stamps). Georgia terminated this help because of time limits built into the program’s rules. Observers often refer to these time limits as the program’s work requirements. However, the two benefit constraints differ in several key ways that are important for lawmakers and advocates to understand.

Basic work requirements have long applied to adults receiving food aid. Congress first established work requirements for adult food stamp recipients in 1971. More than 318,000 adults live in Georgia who receive food stamps and must abide by work requirements unless they qualify for an exemption, according to Division of Family and Children Services records.

In 1996, Congress imposed an additional three-month time limit on food stamp use for adults without disabilities and not living with children. Georgia leaders suspended time limits in response to the recession that started in late 2007 under a waiver from the federal government. The time limit waiver recently expired for 24 Georgia counties.

Federal rules permit states to suspend the three-month time limit for adults without disabilities in places with high unemployment. All of Georgia qualified for this relief during the recession. With an improving employment rate across Georgia, the time limit returned in 2016, causing more than 4,000 non-disabled Georgia adults to lose assistance, as calculated through a review of state records. Adults in even more Georgia counties will likely become subject to the time limit in future years as more local economies improve.

Food Stamp Work Requirements and Time Limits		
	Regular Work Program Requirement	Three-Month Time Limit
Who is Subject to Requirement	All participants from ages 16 to 60, unless exempt.	All participants from ages 18 to 50 without disabilities who do not live with a child, unless exempt.
Who is Exempt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People younger than 16 or older than 60</li> <li>• 16- and 17-year-olds who are not heads of households</li> <li>• People physically or mentally unfit for work as defined by the state food stamp agency</li> <li>• Caregivers of children under the age of six, or incapacitated people</li> <li>• People complying with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) work requirements</li> <li>• Recipients of unemployment compensation</li> <li>• Regular participants of drug addiction or alcoholic treatment and rehabilitation programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People under 18 or older than 50 years of age</li> <li>• People physically or mentally unfit for work as defined by the state food stamp agency</li> <li>• People who live in households with at least one child</li> <li>• People working at least 20 hours per week in exchange for money, goods or services; as part of a program run by the state; in a volunteer capacity, or a combination</li> <li>• Pregnant women</li> </ul>

	Food Stamp Work Requirements and Time Limits	
	Regular Work Program Requirement	Three-Month Time Limit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People working 30 hours per week or earning weekly wages equal to the federal minimum wage multiplied by 30</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People exempt from the regular work program requirements</li> </ul>
How Physical or Mental Unfitness for Employment is Defined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State agency defines physical or mental fitness for employment, to be no less restrictive than the state's TANF program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receiving temporary or permanent disability benefits from government or private sources</li> <li>• Obviously physically or mentally unfit for work as determined by the state agency</li> <li>• If unfitness not obvious, medical professional or social worker statement determines</li> </ul>
How Compliance is Defined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Register for work or be registered by state agency when applying and every 12 months afterward</li> <li>• Participate in employment, training and work activities assigned by state agency</li> <li>• Provide state agency with sufficient information regarding employment status or availability for work</li> <li>• Accept a bona fide offer of suitable employment</li> <li>• Refrain from quitting a job of 30 or more hours a week without good cause</li> <li>• Maintain work effort for at least 30 hours a week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants must find, participate in, and provide documentation of an acceptable work activity</li> <li>• Activities include work in exchange for money, goods or services, volunteer work, or work programs run by the state</li> <li>• State agency does <u>not</u> have to provide an activity</li> </ul>
Number of Hours Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People assigned to participate in employment, training and work activities need to complete 120 hours monthly or hours equal to the value of their food stamps divided by the federal minimum wage (whichever is lower)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80 hours per month or, in the case of workfare, the number of hours equal to the value of their food stamps divided by the federal minimum wage</li> </ul>
Acceptable Employment and Training Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job training programs</li> <li>• Educational programs</li> <li>• Self-employment program</li> <li>• Paid employment</li> <li>• Work in exchange for food (workfare)</li> <li>• Job search program</li> <li>• Job search training program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job training programs</li> <li>• Educational programs</li> <li>• Self-employment program</li> <li>• Paid employment</li> <li>• Work in exchange for food (workfare)</li> <li>• Job search or job search training program, limited to no more than 40 hours per month</li> </ul>
Penalty for Not Complying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People assigned to participate in employment, training and work activities who get off track are disqualified until they comply, but not less than: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1<sup>st</sup> offense: 1 month</li> <li>○ 2<sup>nd</sup> offense: 3 months</li> <li>○ 3<sup>rd</sup> offense: 6 months</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants only eligible for food stamps for three months in a 36-month period.</li> </ul>

Sources: Training Policy in Brief: SNAP Employment and Training Program, National Skills Coalition, November 2014; 7 U.S.C. §2015 (2016); 7 C.F.R. § 273.7, 273.24 (2017); Georgia Online Directives Information System (ODIS) of the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) Food Stamps (SNAP) Section 3380.