



SB 1013: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HUMAN SERVICES

March 15, 2011

Good Day, Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization. Our primary mission is to create long term sustainable solutions to hunger and as such do significant outreach on SNAP, formally known as food stamps. I am here today in opposition to the proposed change to the State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SSNAP) in Section 26 (lines 1239-1242) of SB 1013, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Human Services.

SSNAP provides state funded SNAP benefits/food stamps to legal immigrants in Connecticut. The proposed language would reduce the current SNAP benefit for immigrants, who are here legally, to fifty percent of the current federal SNAP benefit from the already reduced seventy-five percent. We oppose any cuts to the State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

SSNAP provides food stamps to legal immigrants in Connecticut until they can participate in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the new name for food stamps. The USDA allows legal immigrant children, disabled legal immigrants and those who have been in the country for 5 or more years to receive federally-funded SNAP benefits. However, it is during the first 5 years of a person's residency that this type of program is needed the most. Many immigrants come to this country to make a new start and offer us in return their cultural experiences, creativity and, once settled and working, a strong tax base. This program fills the much needed gap left by the federal SNAP rules.

Currently those who are on the SSNAP are receiving 75% of the federal SNAP benefit. The Governor's budget proposes to cut this benefit to 50% of the federal SNAP benefit which would hurt those who need this program at a most critical time. Those participating are receiving, on average, \$136 for the month, while the new proposal would cut this to \$85 per month, a significant cut to their food budget. It is almost certain that everyone will see an increase in our food bills as the cost of transporting food increases due to the high cost of fuel.

In February of this year, 509 low income immigrants participated in this program at a cost to the state of \$68,992 for the month (or \$827,904 for the year). Unlike the huge increases in participation Connecticut has seen in the federal SNAP program, the state-SNAP increases in are not large, 25 new participants in the last 3 months. Once participants have been in the country for five years they transition to the federal program.

Many legal immigrants come to this country to make a new start and offer us in return their cultural experiences, creativity and, once settled and working, a strong tax base. The SNAP allows for legal immigrants to choose the foods they know how to cook rather than the foods given to them at a food pantry, which may be difficult to prepare and eat for them. Immigrants come to this country and eat inexpensive highly processed foods that can have a deleterious effect on their health, creating greater costs to the taxpayer.

We urge you not to make this drastic cut to those who are using the program, and especially NOT to change the legal amount of the benefit to 50%. The savings to the state will *not* be significant yet the harm to the households using the program will be unbearable. Thank you.