

Human Services Committee, March 3, 2016  
Testimony submitted by Lucy Potter, Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid

**S.B. No. 277 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WITHOUT DEPENDENTS TO MEET WORK REQUIREMENTS TO RECEIVE BENEFITS FROM THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. Position: Oppose**

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid. I have represented hundreds of clients seeking SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, also known as food stamps) benefits over the past thirty years. I am also counsel in Briggs v. Bremby, a class action on behalf of tens of thousands of Connecticut residents whose applications for SNAP benefits have been delayed. I am submitting this testimony in opposition to this bill which would force Connecticut to reject \$50 to \$100 million per year in food stamp benefits that indigent people would otherwise receive and put into circulation in the Connecticut economy.<sup>1</sup>

**Background:** In 1996 Congress amended the Food Stamp Act to impose a 20 hour per week work requirement for single people without dependents. This group can only receive three months of benefits every three years, unless they are working, are in workfare programs, or can demonstrate that they are unfit for work. (Able Bodied Adults without Dependents or ABAWD rule.) The provision also allows states to apply for waivers of the rule when there is a high rate of unemployment. Since the recession of 2008, most states had waivers and were not subject to the rule. Connecticut was among those states.

Unemployment has gone down and the rule is now back in effect in Connecticut as of January, 2016. But Connecticut applied for and was granted a waiver from the rule for about half the towns. These are towns and cities with high unemployment rates and adjoining areas. Currently, about 6000 single people without dependents are subject to the rule and could lose their SNAP benefits on April 1. Another 46,000 who would have been affected live in areas of higher unemployment and will continue to receive SNAP benefits. Many of these people are working, but many work less than 20 hours per week or are unemployed. There are no workfare programs.

**S.B. No. 277** would end eligibility for these 46,000 people by essentially requiring the state to disregard the waiver. The federal legislation refers to those affected as "able bodied adults without dependents." In fact, though, this group struggles. A study done by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in 2014, based on national data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, showed that the average income of this group was 17% of poverty. Nearly 1/3 of these SNAP participants were over 40 years old and 40% were women. (See attached.) This is not a group of strapping young people who just want to bilk the system. Rather, many of those who receive SNAP and have no dependents are poorly educated, and face other barriers such as homelessness, untreated illness or criminal history that make them low on the list of employment prospects. Remember also that SNAP benefits are the *only* benefits available for many of the single people in Connecticut who now receive them. I urge you to reject this bill. It would take tens of millions from the most destitute among us, from the merchants they would buy from, and from the Connecticut economy.

<sup>1</sup> Estimate derived as follows. 46,000 X \$194 per month X 12 months = \$107,088,000. If half met the work rules, \$53,544,000.

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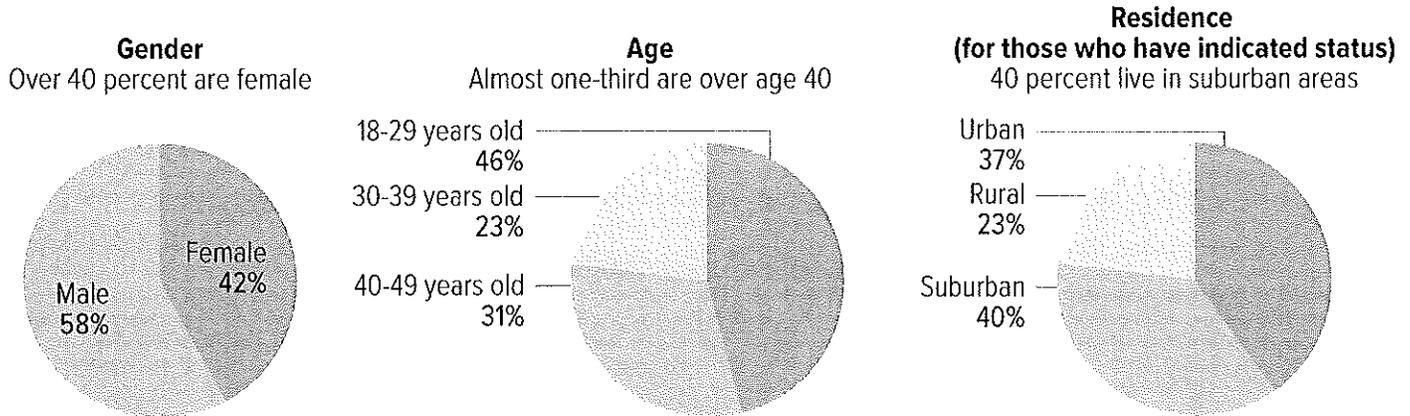


# At Least 500,000 Childless Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016

In many parts of the country, childless unemployed adults who can't find at least a half-time job or a job-training program for 20 hours a week will lose SNAP after three months, regardless of how hard they are looking for work.

## The People at Risk Are a Diverse Group

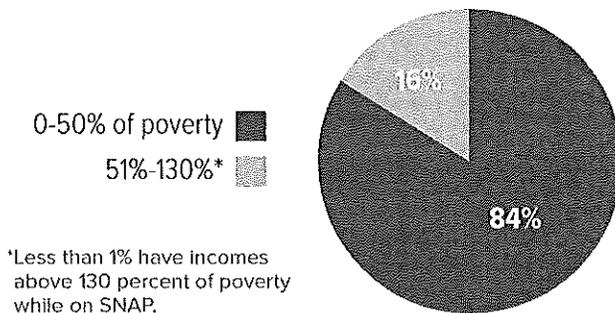
The people at risk of losing SNAP do not fit a particular stereotype.



## They Are Extremely Poor

While on SNAP, their average income is just 17% of the poverty line for an individual, or \$2,000 on an annual basis. Over 80% have incomes below half the poverty line, or \$5,885.

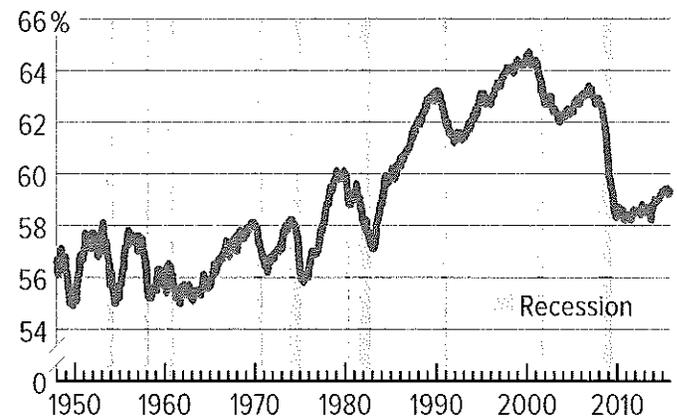
### 4 out of 5 have income below half the poverty line



## They Face a Weak Labor Market

The employment-to-population ratio, a good measure of the actual work force since it isn't lowered artificially when long-term unemployed workers give up looking for work, plummeted in the Recession and remains far below pre-recession levels.

### Employment - Population Ratio



For more information see "More than 500,000 Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016 as Waivers Expire" <http://www.cbpp.org/research/more-than-500000-adults-will-lose-snap-benefits-in-2016-as-waivers-expire>

Note: These statistics are for an average month for adults ages 18-49, without disabilities and children in the household, who are participating in SNAP and not working at least 20 hours a week

Sources: CBPP analysis of 2014 USDA SNAP Household Characteristics data, CBPP calculations from Bureau of Labor Statistics data, CBPP Analysis of March 2015 Current Population Survey data.