



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Won't Accept Hunger, Rallies Together with Anti-Hunger Advocates to Support Food Assistance Programs

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller and other Governor's Food Security Partnership member agencies – the departments of Aging, Health, Community and Economic Development, Education and Agriculture – today joined Feeding Pennsylvania and the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank to vocally oppose the Trump Administration's proposals to devalue the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The message was clear: recently introduced federal rules will cause families to suffer from hunger, charitable food networks to strain to meet increased demand, and retailers and food producers to lose profits and experience a more constrained customer base.

"More than one million people around Pennsylvania do not know where they will get their next meal," said DHS Secretary Miller. "For these people, food insecurity is their daily reality. However, programs like SNAP and charitable food networks help working adults, people with disabilities, older adults, and children access food and expand their purchasing power so they do not have to choose between paying for a doctor's appointment or replacing an old pair of shoes and being able to eat dinner. We cannot make life more difficult for vulnerable people in Pennsylvania and around the country."

SNAP helps more than 1.7 million Pennsylvanians access food, including about 700,000 children, about 690,000 people with disabilities, and about 300,000 older adults. As Pennsylvanians struggle to find access to reliable and nutritious meals, it creates profound effects on a person's life, including increased risks for chronic diseases, higher chances of hospitalization, poorer overall health, and increased healthcare costs. With the support of SNAP, children go on to have higher graduation rates, increased adult earnings, and improved health outcomes in their adult life. Older adults who are enrolled in SNAP are healthier, hospitalized less and are less likely to go to a nursing home.

SNAP also supports the Pennsylvania economy with over 10,000 authorized retailers that participate in SNAP across Pennsylvania. These retailers redeemed about \$2.6 billion in SNAP benefits in 2018 according to the United States Department of Agriculture. SNAP also provides support for programs like SNAP 50/50, where non-profit organizations leverage their funding with matched funds from the federal government to provide career-specific skills training for people receiving SNAP benefits.

The Trump Administration has proposed two rules and has finalized a third that will jeopardize access to SNAP:

- **Abled-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) final rule:** In December 2019, the Trump Administration published a final rule, that goes into effect April 2020, that restricts states' ability to determine which counties can be waived from work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents, which are waived due to local unemployment rates. The ability to waive counties is now based on federally determined Labor Market Areas and on economic factors like excess labor and high unemployment.

The new rule lowers the threshold for unemployment rates those areas must meet to qualify for a waiver and removes state flexibility to determine which counties should be waived, despite states being better positioned to determine the economic environment in the local economies.

This rule change will jeopardize access to SNAP for more than 92,000 people across the state, many of whom struggle with mental health, substance use disorder, and other long-term conditions that would be worsened by chronic hunger.

- **Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) proposed rule:** The Trump Administration in July announced a proposal to eliminate BBCE for SNAP. BBCE is a policy that gives states, including Pennsylvania, the flexibility to determine appropriate income thresholds and extend SNAP benefits to low-income families and individuals who would otherwise struggle to afford food. With BBCE, a Pennsylvania family of four is eligible for SNAP if they earn no more than about \$40,000 a year. If BBCE is eliminated, that family of four's SNAP eligibility limit will drop from about \$40,000 a year to no more than \$32,000 a year. For elderly single-person households, the limit would change from approximately \$24,000 a year to about \$15,000. This rule would jeopardize food access for more than 200,000 people.

Eliminating BBCE also impacts the ability for low-income children to receive free and reduced-price school lunches. Families whose children are eligible for SNAP receive direct certification for eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches. Additionally, in districts where 40 percent or more children receive free and reduced-price lunches, the school qualifies for the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools and school districts in low-income areas to provide free school lunches to the entire school. Reduction in the number of children receiving direct certification may mean entire districts lose their ability to provide free meals for all students.

- **Heating/Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) proposed rule:** And in October, the Trump Administration announced a proposal to alter the method Pennsylvania uses to determine the Heating/Cooling SUA for SNAP recipients, which could negatively affect approximately 775,000 households in Pennsylvania. When DHS determines that a household is eligible for SNAP, to determine the value of the grant they will receive, the SUA is used as a factor; acknowledging that money needed to pay for shelter and utilities is not available to be used to purchase food.

The Trump Administration's rule would use a standard formula to determine each state's SUA for the entire country, ignoring costs of living and utility rates that vary from state to state. The proposed rule impacts the Northeast states more significantly than the rest of the country due to the information used in the calculation. In Pennsylvania, each reduction in the SUA of \$10 equates to a \$2 to \$3 reduction in SNAP benefits. If the Heating and Cooling SUA was reduced by \$200, for example, most households would see a reduction in SNAP benefits of \$40 to \$60 per month.

The Wolf Administration was joined by representatives of Feeding Pennsylvania, a partnership formed among eight of Pennsylvania's Feeding America member food banks. Through this partnership, they serve nearly two million low-income individuals annually by distributing more than 160 million pounds of food across Pennsylvania. The mission of Feeding Pennsylvania is to assist members in securing food and other resources for themselves and for people in need and to provide a collective voice on the issues of hunger and food access.

"For years, Pennsylvania's food banks have been dedicated to our mission of supporting those in need of food," said Jane Clements-Smith, executive director of Feeding Pennsylvania. "Often SNAP benefits are not enough to meet the needs of low-income families for an entire month, and so the charitable food network works to bridge the gap and help families to stretch their already tight budgets. The cuts that have been proposed would mean that our network would have double and triple our work, and the fact is, we are concerned that we will not have the capacity to meet this increase in need."

"Over the past couple of months, I have had the opportunity witness the great work of food banks across the state, hear some SNAP recipients, and even grocery retailers – and I have yet to meet a SNAP recipient who wants to stay on government assistance," said DHS Secretary Miller. "Despite confusion over the proposed changes and the unknowns, one thing is clear – we are united in that will not accept that people should live with food insecurity. The federal government must recognize how this will hurt people around the country and stop these changes. No person should go hungry, and we are committed to fighting these changes however we can."

DHS will be continue visiting communities to share the stories of those who would be affected by these harmful proposals to cut assistance. For more information on upcoming events, contact the DHS Press Office.

For more information on the Governor's Food Security Partnership and food assistance programs, visit www.dhs.pa.gov.

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