

IMPACT OF THE PRESIDENT'S FY 2020 BUDGET ON CHILD NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

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The President's Fiscal Year 2020 (FY 20) budget includes several harmful proposals that would drastically cut and restructure domestic food assistance programs that serve children. If enacted, these changes would be devastating for children struggling with poverty and food insecurity (the lack of consistent access to healthy meals). Taken together, the various cuts within the President's FY 20 Budget Proposal for the US Department of Agriculture would exacerbate the ongoing crisis of child food insecurity in the US. Here's how the proposed budget would make it harder for struggling families to put food on the table:

Proposes to cut and Radically Restructure Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the largest federal nutrition program, and every year its benefits help millions of low-income households afford nutritious food, with children comprising nearly half of participants. Monthly benefits are already thought to be inadequate to mitigate the effects of food insecurity on participating children. But rather than strengthening SNAP, the FY 20 budget proposes cuts to SNAP of \$219 billion over 10 years. Many of these proposed cuts are thanks to policy suggestions that would harm children, including:

- » **Replacing electronic benefits with direct USDA food packages:** The President's Budget revives its proposal from last year to reduce SNAP benefits in exchange for a food box (lacking fresh produce or meat) for households receiving more than \$90. This "Harvest Box" proposal would disproportionately impact the 9.2 million SNAP households with children, as their benefit levels tend to be highest on average. The proposed system is not grounded in evidence, and its implementation would be complicated and prohibitively costly for states, who the administration would make responsible for administering the program. It would also undermine the quality of SNAP diets and create undue hardship for families experiencing homelessness and housing instability.
- » **Reintroducing burdensome and redundant eligibility requirements:** The FY 20 budget would add restrictions to Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE), an option that reduces administrative burden and red tape by streamlining SNAP eligibility requirements for low-income families. Changes to BBCE would be especially harmful for the 265,000 low-income children who, because they participate in SNAP, are also directly certified for free school meals.¹
- » **Expanding Harmful SNAP Time Limits for Unemployed and Underemployed Individuals:** The FY 20 budget proposal revises a policy proposal that would subject additional vulnerable adults to SNAP time limits if they struggle to access or document a certain number of work hours. Such policies targeting so-called "adults without dependents" would have unintended consequences for low-income children who rely on extended family or non-custodial parents for financial support and create additional barriers to food assistance for former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth.
- » **Capping SNAP benefits for large families (six or more members):** The administration is also proposing an arbitrary limit on SNAP benefits for large households that would inherently disadvantage families with children.

» **Eliminating valuable nutrition education (SNAP-ED):** The President's Budget also seeks to eliminate funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Nutrition Education, which provides critical programming that supports policy, system, and environmental changes that promote healthier food choices and physical activity amongst participants. This evidence-based program has been associated with healthier eating amongst low-income elementary school aged children.

Proposes to Significantly Reduce Access to School Meals Programs

Along with SNAP, child nutrition programs such as the National School Lunch and National School Breakfast programs provide an important layer of defense against child food insecurity. Low income children who are able to access school meals at no or low cost receive critical nutrition and sustenance that allows them to learn, grow, and thrive at school. The President's FY 20 Budget would reduce access to these resources with changes to verification processes and limiting options for schools to utilize the Community Eligibility Provision, a tool that streamlines access to free school meals. In total, these changes would cut spending on School Meals Programs by \$1.7 billion over ten years.

Possibly Underestimates Caseloads for Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC helps improve the health and nutritional intake of low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children up to their fifth birthday. WIC serves about half of all babies in the United States. The President's FY 20 proposal for grants to states for WIC is \$5.75 billion, a 13 percent cut from FY 19. This cut is based on a declining projected caseload, but because WIC relies on discretionary funding appropriated annually, these levels could prove inadequate if caseloads exceed the administration's estimates.

Seeks to Eliminate Discretionary Programs Supporting Child Nutrition

The President's Budget would, if enacted, also zero out several other discretionary programs that support child food security and nutrition. That includes the \$28 million Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Demonstration Program, which combats the problem of summer hunger by providing low-income children with additional resources to purchase food, as well as the \$30 million School Meal Equipment Grants program, which assists schools (especially low-income schools) in updating their kitchen equipment to more easily meet school nutrition standards.

CONTACT

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ENDNOTES

¹ The Congressional Budget Office, "Cost Estimate for H.R. 2 as ordered by the House Committee on Agriculture on April 18, 2018," May 2018, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files?file=2018-07/hr2_1.pdf.