



# *The Kid Angle*

*Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children*

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## **Work requirements work against children**

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[Work requirements snagged the spotlight](#) on Capitol Hill this week as lawmakers began floating ideas for strengthening them as a condition of food, medical and other aid to low-income households.

Many supporters of stronger work requirements have been careful to suggest they will only apply to “[those without dependents](#)” or “[able-bodied...childless adults](#).” This sounds like it will spare people with children. **Here is the truth: Children will suffer anyway.**

Let’s start with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly called food stamps, which several lawmakers have squarely in their sites. SNAP currently feeds more than 14 million children. **Four million of them could go hungry, as First Focus on Children’s policy experts note in [this recently released brief](#), under current proposals to expand SNAP’s work requirements to parents and caregivers of school-age children, that is, kids 7-18 year-olds.** But children will also suffer even under legislation that focuses specifically on individuals without children. The fact is that families are often complex and multi-generational, and in many cases, low-income families pool resources. Taking food from adults in the household affects everyone who sits at the table.

**The word “dependents” causes part of the problem.** Non-custodial caregivers — aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents — may provide most of a child’s care even if they do not have legal custody. [One proposal](#) suggests raising the age for work requirements from 49 to 65, which would implicate a large number of care-taking grandparents.

Proposals requiring “adults” — people age 18 and above — to meet work requirements also would **severely disadvantage [children aging out of the foster care system and youth experiencing homelessness](#)**. These young people already experience high rates of unemployment and poverty and face barriers to accessing public assistance programs.

**The term “[work requirements](#)” offers another thorny issue.** Data shows that in most low-income households at least one family member has a steady job. **In many cases, “work requirements” simply “require” the employed individual to document their “work,” erecting new barriers to aid for those who need it most.** Low-wage earners often work an unpredictable number of hours from week to week. Many immigrant workers are paid in cash and therefore have no evidence of employment — or bosses who are unwilling to provide evidence. Many individuals are self-employed, complicating employment verification. **Perhaps most important, none of these proposals consider uncompensated childrearing “work.”**

Increasing work requirements will ripple through aid to children.

For instance, 85 million people — including more than 34 million children — have health insurance through **Medicaid, another program being considered for work requirements**. Data shows that children are much more likely to be insured when the adults in their household are insured. Pandemic-era provisions that suspended disenrollment pushed the number of uninsured individuals : Just 5.4% of children were uninsured during this time. Those provisions have now ended. [Federal research suggests that 74% of the kids who lose coverage now will actually still be eligible, but will be disenrolled as a result of bureaucratic red tape.](#) Compound this red tape with the red tape of work requirements and you've created a fast lane to coverage loss for eligible people, with and without children.

So far, the conversation around work requirements has simply [revealed the need to strengthen, not weaken, the country's social safety net.](#) As usual, the blunt edge of the policies under discussion will disproportionately hit children of color and families in marginalized communities. In a 2019 study, the [National Academy of Sciences determined that “work requirements are at least as likely to increase as to decrease poverty.”](#) In the post-Roe era, work requirements and other miserly policies are more likely to continue hurting children and the people who care for them. Our policy team outlines the [danger of work requirements and other obstacles to services in this brief.](#)

**Supporters cite record employment and a dearth of workers as part of the rationale for work requirements.** Pandemic-era assistance such as the improved Child Tax Credit showed that **when you give people — especially single mothers — unrestricted aid, they will use it on child care, transportation and other services that make it possible them to get to work.** So perhaps restricting aid is not the way to encourage more people to enter the workforce.

Then again, a growing number of states are making it [easier than ever to put children themselves to work.](#) Perhaps they can fill the gap.



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