

# Gadsden Times

## Food stamp cuts won't occur until 2014

By Dana Beyerle, Times Montgomery Bureau

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MONTGOMERY — The \$26 billion medical and teacher bailout bill signed by President Barack Obama cuts \$12 billion in future food stamp payments for Alabama and other states.

The food stamp cut is in an amendment hidden in an aeronautical bill the House approved on Tuesday and Obama signed the same day. The bill provides \$16 billion in Medicaid funding and \$10 billion to stave off teacher layoffs, but an amendment cuts food stamps. The Senate passed it last week.

The amount of the future cut for Alabama in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides food stamps, is not yet known, said Alabama Department of Human Resources spokesman Barry Spear.

“We're trying to figure it out,” Spear said Wednesday. “There's no effect immediately.”

Spear said the cuts won't occur until 2014, and congressional leaders said they will return food stamp spending to pre-stimulus levels.

Kimble Forrister, state director of Alabama Arise, said he was concerned when he first heard of the cut. “We found out that this food stamp money is for future years and the benefit is we're able to keep health care and education budgets stronger at the state level,” Forrister said.

Todd Stacy, a spokesman for Gov. Bob Riley, said the federal bill contains \$133 million for Alabama Medicaid and \$149 million to keep K-12 teachers on the job.

Alabama Arise said advocates are calling on Congress to restore the food stamp benefit increase.

Information about the food stamp amendment was not yet labeled by Congress and was difficult if not impossible to find.

Alabama Grocers Association President Ellie Taylor said the cut will be about \$59 for a family of four. “Grocers are very concerned about our customers and (that) their nutritional needs are met,” Taylor said.

The Department of Human Resources said 816,400 people in Alabama received food stamp benefits in June, a record.

Also a record was the \$103.7 million in food stamp payments in Alabama in June.

All members of Alabama's House and Senate delegations voted against the bill except for U.S. Rep. Artur Davis, D-Birmingham.

Davis spokeswoman Allyson Freeman in an e-mail said he was traveling Wednesday and could not be reached for a statement.

Alabama Department of Education Finance Director Craig Pouncey said based on the average salary, \$149 million for teachers could protect 2,700 teaching positions.

"We anticipate that these funds can also be used for other critical instructional personnel, which could include instructional aides, counselors," he said.

Pouncey said the U.S. Department of Education has 45 days to send the money.

"We are preparing our school districts to include these funds within their (next fiscal year) preliminary budgets that are currently being developed and are due to us by Sept. 15," Pouncey said.