



New SNAP limits would hurt struggling families

By Carol Gundlach, policy analyst

SB 139, sponsored by Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, would reduce Alabama’s flexibility in the administration of SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). These changes would make it more difficult for otherwise eligible households to receive benefits. Some specific examples:

- Alabama has taken advantage of a federal option that allows elderly SNAP recipients to get food assistance even if they have cash resources, such as savings for health care or funeral costs. SB 139 would deny help to seniors who have been able to save money for such critical needs.
- SB 139 could cut food assistance to some families who need more than one car to get to work, school, errands and doctor’s visits. Alabama already counts the value of cash and other “liquid” resources in determining the SNAP eligibility of households without seniors. Our state has elected, however, not to count the value of automobiles or other non-liquid resources in determining SNAP eligibility. This helps recipients in households where more than one person has a car, because otherwise, some of the cash value of a second car could be treated as an asset. Reinstating the resource limits, as SB 139 would do, could make some families choose between essential transportation and food. Other families, including seniors or people with disabilities, could be denied SNAP because they own an old trailer or inherited a small plot of land on which they do not live.
- SB 139 would deny food assistance to someone who does not “cooperate” with child support. This would require DHR to spend tens of millions for additional child support administration and could put applicants who are victims of domestic violence or child abuse at greater risk.

Alabama’s SNAP enrollment has declined, and it has one of the lowest error and fraud rates of any program in the country. SNAP is highly responsive to economic trends. As the state’s economy improves, the number of people on SNAP has declined by 7 percent since 2013. Alabama’s rate of SNAP errors resulting in overpayments (including mistakes by recipients or DHR workers) was only 1.26 percent in 2014, the most recent year for which data are available.

SB 139 would hurt children, seniors, and people with disabilities. In Alabama, 71 percent of SNAP families had a child in the household. Research has found that children who had access to food assistance in early childhood and whose mothers had access during pregnancy had better health and educational outcomes as adults than children who didn’t have access. Nearly one in five SNAP families have a person who is elderly or disabled. And 40 percent of all SNAP recipients live in families with at least one working member.

Federally funded assistance programs are important to Alabama’s economy. SNAP benefits contribute nearly \$2.5 billion in economic activity to local Alabama communities and support as many as 23,000 jobs. Many grocery stores in Alabama rely on SNAP receipts to remain in the black and stay open for everyone in their community.