



Press release

For immediate release
August 25, 2014

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policymattersohio.org/food-aid-aug-2014

New Cuts to Food Aid in Ohio Should Not Go Forward

Citing a weak job market and a mounting threat that basic human needs are not being met in Ohio, human services advocates and others today called on the Kasich administration to reconsider its decision and to push for full federal food assistance in all Ohio counties.

“Ohio should accept the federal government’s waiver of work requirements for all counties of the state,” said Wendy Patton, Senior Project Director for Policy Matters Ohio. “We call on the Kasich Administration to maximize its use of federal resources so that hungry Ohioans can meet their most basic need – food.”

Patton’s statement was echoed by The Ohio Association of Foodbanks, The Ohio Poverty Law Center, The Ohio Council of Churches, UHCAN Ohio and the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO).

“Those hurt by the rejection of the waiver for most places in Ohio include many of the same who are being served through the Governor’s Medicaid expansion,” said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. “Our organization interviewed 2,541 adults in Franklin County who lost food assistance in 2014 because of the rejection of the waiver and found a third of them (33.1 percent) suffer from poor physical or mental health. Lack of food compounds health problems that curtail the ability of these individuals to get and keep a job and may expand their need for health and hospital services.”

“While there has been some improvement in Ohio’s economy, there are plenty of low-wage workers and unemployed people who struggle with basic survival,” said Bill Faith, Executive Director of COHHIO. “The very least we can do is not withhold the meager food assistance they could be eligible for.”

A full statement by the groups follows:

The Kasich Administration has reduced access to food aid for unemployed and underemployed adults without dependents by refusing a federal waiver of work requirements in 71 Ohio counties. This is the second year in which the waiver has been refused for most Ohio counties.

The primary food aid program is the federal government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps. The program is 100 percent federally funded and assistance under the program can only be used to buy food.

Under federal rules, able-bodied adults without children can receive food aid in only 3 months out of a 36-month period unless they have a job or participate in a work program. A state can qualify for a 12-month, statewide waiver of these requirements if the United States Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance Service determines that it qualifies for extended unemployment benefits. Ohio has qualified for this waiver since 2007.

The waiver for the entire state was accepted from 2007 through 2013. The Kasich Administration accepted the waiver for just 16 mostly rural counties last year, but refused the waiver for the rest, including many urban and suburban counties. This year, the administration accepted the waiver for 17 counties, most of which were the same as last year.

On August 15, 2014, advocates filed a civil rights complaint about the disparate impact on minorities. Last week, the Kasich Administration notified counties that they would pursue essentially the same strategy for the waiver for the coming year.

Ohio remains 129,300 jobs below the level of the start of the recession in 2007. The Ohio workforce has shrunk by 222,000 since the recovery began. Many are unable to find a job and no longer report themselves as looking for work.

Jobless Ohioans who seek food aid can sometimes get a work assignment at their local job and family service agency and qualify for ongoing food assistance. However, the number of work slots has been far lower than the number who lost food aid as the waiver ended in most places.

Those who do not get a work assignment or cannot meet the requirements of the assignment will exhaust their three months of food aid eligibility and then turn to food pantries or soup kitchens or go without food.

Those hurt by the rejection of the waiver for most Ohio counties include many of the same people who are being served through the Governor's Medicaid expansion. The Ohio Association of Foodbanks interviewed 2,541 adults in Franklin County who lost food assistance in 2014 because of the rejection of the waiver and found a third of them (33.1 percent) suffer from poor physical or mental health. Lack of food compounds health problems that curtail the ability of these individuals to get and keep a job and may expand their need for health and hospital services.

Ohio should accept the federal government's waiver of work requirements for all counties of the state. We call on the Kasich Administration to maximize its use of federal resources so that hungry Ohioans can meet their most basic need – food.

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