

HB 285 Would Increase Hunger in Texas

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HB 285 is shortsighted and would lead to higher rates of hunger by ending Texas' flexibility to target SNAP assistance to respond to recessions, local workforce conditions and to the needs of special groups like former foster care children or struggling veterans.

Texas has some of the most stringent Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) rules in the country. In addition to the income and asset restrictions, to receive SNAP in Texas adults without children in the home must work or be looking for work through the SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) program for at least 30 hours per week. Adults without children who are not able meet the 30 hours a week requirement are time limited and can only receive SNAP for up to **3 months every 3 years**.

Federal officials, who pay 100% of SNAP benefits, recognize that states need flexibility to respond to local conditions and allow states to waive the time limits in areas with very high unemployment where there are no jobs to be found. States are also given the flexibility to waive select groups of individuals if they chose. Texas has always been extremely conservative in the use of its waiver authority, but maintaining the states' flexibility to deal with future needs is critical. **HB 285 would ban the state from ever issuing a waiver of the SNAP time limits regardless of the circumstances.**

HB 285 would prevent the state from extending SNAP benefits for Texans with very real barriers to finding and maintaining full-time work and who suffer from extremely high rates of hunger including:

- Former foster care children who too often struggle to find work or attend school after leaving the state's custody.
- Veterans who struggle to reintegrate and may have untreated mental health needs.
- Formerly incarcerated Texans who cannot find work because many employers will not hire anyone with a criminal record.

HB 285 is promoted as being a bill to help rural counties access job training as it includes language directing state agencies to provide SNAP E&T services to all adults without children statewide. That argument ignores the fact that 1) there is absolutely no need to ban waivers if you want to increase services and 2) at \$145/month per person, the funding is totally inadequate to provide real training. Unfortunately, in Texas SNAP E&T entails forcing people into job search activities or workfare placements to maintain their benefits instead of helping people obtain meaningful job skills.

HB 285 would unnecessarily cede Texas' control over SNAP policy to federal officials and tie the states hands in the future by stopping the state from waiving the SNAP time limit:

- When a disaster like Hurricane Harvey devastates a community and stores and businesses are damaged and their workers suffer.
- When a town's major employer shuts its doors and jobs are scarce.
- When the next national recession hits and full-time employment is hard to find.
- When Texans with real barriers to finding work need help like former foster care children, veterans and the formerly incarcerated.