Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2020

One-Pager

Background:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is an effective anti-poverty, anti-hunger, and countercyclical program, responding quickly to a sudden downturn in the economy to both reduce the hardship caused and create economic activity. However, SNAP has a number of empirically proven design deficiencies that undermine its capacity as a countercyclical program, including:

* **Benefits are out-of-step with household food needs, and leave beneficiaries without enough food to get through the month.** SNAP beneficiaries’ caloric intake fall toward the end of the month. This leads to an increase in food insecurity, degradation of diet quality, and there is evidence that it lowers children’s test scores, increases incidents of school misbehavior, and increases hospitalizations to treat diet-related illnesses.
* **Time limits for Able-bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs) leave those with high barriers to employment without food.** Current law limits SNAP eligibility to 3-months of benefits in a 36-month period unless a recipient deemed an ABAWD works or participates in a qualifying training activity at least 80 hours per month. This population often have high barriers to employment, and qualified training programs have a limited number of spots.
* **The block-granted Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands do not scale without an Act of Congress.**

## Bill Summary:

The Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2020 would strengthen SNAP as an anti-hunger, anti-poverty, and countercyclical program in the following three ways:

1. **Increases benefits by replacing the baseline for SNAP benefits, the Thrifty Food Plans (TFP), with the Low-cost Food Plan (LCFP). The LCFP is approximately 30% higher than the TFP. This better aligns with household needs, prevents food insecurity, and allows for greater nutritional variety and more nutritionally adequate meals.**
2. **Increases the minimum benefit, removes the $35 “co-pay” on medical expenses for the purpose of benefit calculation, permanently authorizes a standard medical deduction with a floor of $140, and eliminates the cap on shelter deductions for the purpose of benefit calculation.**
3. **Eliminates the SNAP ABAWD time limit.**
4. **Transitions the territories of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands from the block-grant NAP to the entitlement SNAP.**

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