



December 11, 2019

Work Requirements for SNAP Recipients

I have been working with the Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) and her team because we adamantly oppose the federal rule change to SNAP policy that would require work requirements for approximately 140,000 low-income individuals in Illinois and hundreds of thousands more across the country.

Many SNAP participants face serious barriers to employment, such as untreated mental illnesses or substance use disorders; justice involvement; and significant physical limitations; and would not be able to immediately meet the work requirements, which could go into effect as soon as April 1, 2020.

Families, especially children, on the West Side of Chicago will be impacted by the federal rule change, so I've been working with the IDHS to appropriately exempt any individuals with these types of barriers so they do not need to meet the work requirements.

According to Washington Post reporter Catherine Rampell, the group of people affected by this new rule are the neediest, making just 18% of the poverty line. These folks are not living a life of luxury. Especially when you realize that the average SNAP benefits are \$165 per month, or about \$1.83 per meal. Food pantries across the state and country will inevitably see an increase in need.

There is little evidence that receiving food stamps discourages people from working, according to Craig Gunderson, a University of Illinois economist specializing in food insecurity. Most food stamp recipients already work, and many others can and want to work. I am working with Illinois DHS Secretary Grace Hou to engage in a robust effort to prepare for this rule change so we can help as many SNAP participants as possible who are not exempted to find employment and training that would meet the work requirement. Although federal employment resources were NOT increased with the increased work requirements, the state has stepped in to implement several new initiatives and expand our employment programs to help. Established specialty teams at our local DHS Public Aid offices will work with Able-Bodied without Dependents (ABAWD) customers to help connect them with appropriate work or training activities that will meet the work requirements.

An interagency team has been launched including the Illinois Departments of Employment Security, Economic Opportunity, and the Illinois Community College Board to develop robust referral resources for work and training programs outside of IDHS programming. Work is also ongoing to expand supportive services for ABAWDs like funding for transportation, uniforms, professional licenses, and

other work-related needs.

Criteria for the ABAWD waiver is complicated and requires calculations by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). IDHS has been working with the CBPP to analyze the new rule and determine its exact effect on Illinois. We expect most, if not all, Illinois counties will no longer be exempt from work requirements for ABAWDs.

No matter what, we need to continue the fight to exempt those who really cannot work so they can receive the SNAP benefits and the food they need to survive, and we need to really help those who can work receive the support they need to find living wage jobs so they can eat, survive, and thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District