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SNAP Policy:

The Return of the Harsh Three-Month Time Limit for Childless, Non-Disabled Adults

BY Tazra Mitchell, Policy Analyst

More than 100,000 of the state's poorest adults could be cut off the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2016 due to the return of a harsh three-month time limit for childless, non-disabled adults aged 18-49. These adults will lose their food aid after three months if they can't find a job, job-training program, or volunteer opportunity for 20 hours per week—regardless of labor market and economic conditions in their community.

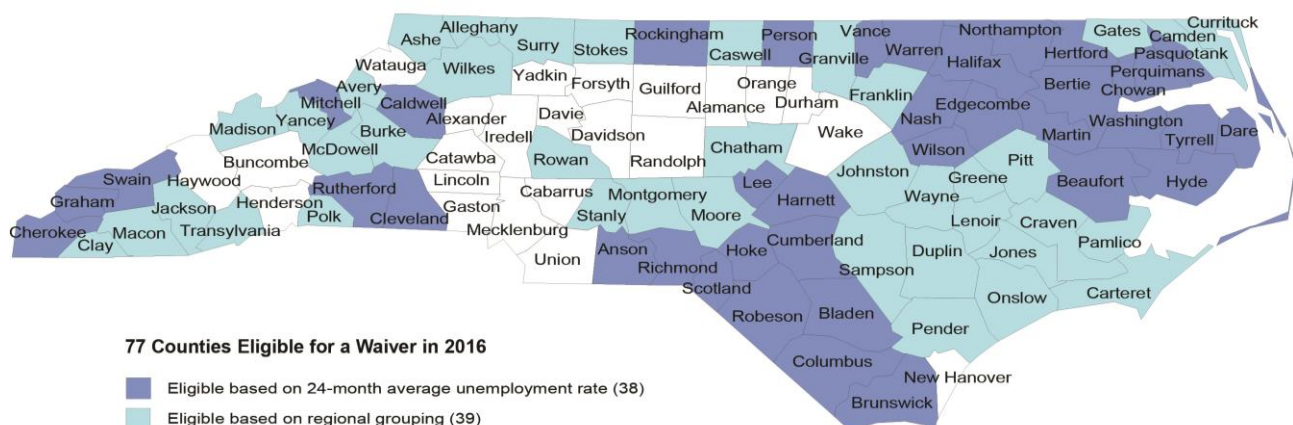
*North Carolina is the **9th most food insecure, or hungriest, state in the nation.**¹ SNAP is the nation's most important anti-hunger program and plays a critical role in ensuring that North Carolina households have enough to eat.*

State Lawmakers Restricted SNAP for Adults Who Live in Jobs-Deprived Areas

States may seek a temporary waiver from the three-month time limit for areas—such as the entire state, a region, or a county—with sustained high levels of unemployment or during times of national economic distress.² The time limit would have returned for 23 of North Carolina's 100 counties in 2016 regardless of state action because of an improving economy in those counties. The remaining 77 counties qualified for a year-long waiver but the governor and legislature permanently banned state waivers after July 2016.³ Now, the three-month time limit will return at least six months sooner for those 77 counties (see map and appendix).

State policymakers do not have to request a waiver but it is an important tool to ensure people have food to eat and to stabilize the economy in times of economic distress. The new ban eliminates any ability to use SNAP benefits to help alleviate widespread joblessness now or in a future recession.

FIGURE 1: More than 100,000 of NC's Poorest Adults Living Primarily in Rural Areas Could Lose SNAP



Map and data provided by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. September 2015.

Tight Labor Market, Too Few Job Training Slots Make the Time Limit Even More Severe

North Carolina does not have a plan in place to provide a job opening, volunteer position, or skills training opportunity to all individuals subject to the time limit. As a result, poor jobless adults may lose food assistance despite looking for work or even working less than 20 hours a week.

Job opportunities are very limited in North Carolina, making it difficult for many childless adults to meet the requirements associated with the time limit. In September 2015, 80 of the state's 100 counties had more jobless workers than job openings.⁴ Job opportunities are especially limited for this group who tends to need retraining, industry credentials, or development of basic job skills like reading and writing.

Also, the time limit is not a test of one's willingness to work. It applies regardless of whether these individuals are actually looking to find employment or training opportunities. No matter how hard they look for a job, if they don't find one in three months, their food assistance is gone. Even if they are working for 19 hours a week, they would lose any assistance in putting food on the table.

Some states pledge to offer a job or training opportunity to all childless adults receiving food assistance in an effort to support sustainable pathways to gainful employment. North Carolina has not pledged to do so nor has planned to make available skills training opportunities that could remove barriers to employment for some. There are only a handful of counties that operate a SNAP employment and training program, with fewer than 1,300 slots expected to be available to this group of childless adults—but there are more than 100,000 adults that will be subject to the time limit.⁵ Lastly, volunteer postings totaling 20 hours a week are hard to come by in many urban areas, let alone more rural settings.

The Three-Month Time Limit Applies to Very Poor, Vulnerable North Carolinians

The childless, non-disabled adults that are subject to the time limit live in extreme poverty: they have an average annual income of \$2,200, or just 19 percent of the poverty line, while on SNAP. With already meager incomes, this group could be pushed even deeper into economic hardship due to the loss of food assistance, which averages \$150 to \$200 per person per month. Very few qualify for other forms of assistance and live without much of a safety net.⁶

This group is diverse and includes veterans, people who are homeless, and under-unemployed workers who want to work. More specifically, 4 in 10 are women, 4 in 10 live in suburban areas, and 1 in 3 are over the age of 40.⁷

In addition to working, volunteering, or participating in a job training program for at least 20 hours per week, there are exemptions to the time limit for people in this group who fit any of the following criteria:

- **Living in a household with a child under 18 even if (s)he is not the caretaker of the child**
- **Is physically or mentally unable to work 20 hours per week (even temporarily and can include people who are homeless)**
- **Is pregnant**
- **Providing care for an incapacitated person regardless of where that person lives**
- **Participating in a substance abuse program**
- **Receiving or applied for unemployment benefits**
- **In school at least half time, including WIOA training programs (exemption continues during breaks before graduation)**
- **Participating in Work First Family Assistance**
- **Participating in Refugee Cash Assistance**
- **Participating in DSS employment and training program for 20 hours per week**
- **Participating in workfare (does not currently exist in North Carolina)**
- **Has a good cause for failure to work 80 hours per month (illness, family emergency, transportation)**

SNAP Benefits Help to Stimulate North Carolina's Economy

Food assistance provides jobless workers with the modest but critical support to purchase food at local grocery stores and retail outlets. In turn, SNAP benefits help protect the economy at large by increasing demand, which saves current jobs and helps create new ones. SNAP benefits also help grow the economy by creating a ripple effect. Moody's Analytics estimates that in a weak economy, every dollar increase in SNAP benefits generates about \$1.70 in economic activity.⁸

In 2013, SNAP benefits pumped about \$2.5 billion into North Carolina's economy.⁹ As such, the return of the three-month time limit will likely harm local economies in the state—now and in the future.

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1. Coleman-Jensen, Alicia et al. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2014." United States Department of Agriculture. September 2015. Available here: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1896841/err194.pdf>
 2. United States Department of Agriculture. "SNAP Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents." Accessed November 2015. Available here: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawds>. States can seek a waiver for areas with a 10 percent average unemployment rate for a recent 12 month or 3 month period, an unemployment rate 20 percent above the national average for a recent 24 month period, or for an area that is either designated a Labor Surplus Area or qualifies for extended unemployment insurance benefits.
 3. Governor McCrory signed into law House Bill 318, "Protect North Carolina Workers Act," or SL2015-294, on October 29, 2015.
 4. NC Budget and Tax Center's analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistic data, September 2015.
 5. NC Department of Health and Human Services. "The North Carolina Food and Nutrition Services Employment and Training State Plan for FY 2016." October 2015.
 6. Ed Bolen. "Approximately 1 Million Unemployed Childless Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016 as State Waivers Expire." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. January 2015. Data reflect the national profile. Available here: <http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/approximately-1-million-unemployed-childless-adults-will-lose-snap-benefits>
 7. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "About 1 Million Childless Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016." January 2015. Available here: <http://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/1-13-15fa-infographic.pdf>
 8. Rosenbaum, Dottie. "SNAP is Effective and Efficient." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. March 2013. Available here: <http://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-is-effective-and-efficient>
 9. Kennedy, Brian. "Chartbook: SNAP and Hunger in North Carolina." NC Budget and Tax Center. July 2015. Available here: <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=budget-and-tax/chartbook-snap-and-hunger-north-carolina>

APPENDIX: The Time Limit Will Return to All 100 Counties, Most of Which Have More Jobless Workers than Job Openings and Limited Job Training Opportunities

COUNTY	Number of Childless Adults Potentially Subject to the Time Limit	Date the Time Limit Goes into Effect	Total Number of Unemployed (September 2015)	Job Openings (September 2015)	WIOA Eligible Training Programs
<i>*These 77 counties qualified for a waiver for all of 2016 but the North Carolina General Assembly passed and the Governor signed a bill prohibiting the waiver from being implemented after July 1 and prohibits any future waivers statewide.</i>					
Alamance	1,308	January 1	3,866	4,140	98
Alexander	325	January 1	823	279	0
Alleghany	61	July 1*	244	138	0
Anson	548	July 1*	694	324	77
Ashe	213	July 1*	672	279	1
Avery	109	July 1*	394	122	2
Beaufort	568	July 1*	1,259	688	41
Bertie	391	July 1*	585	200	0
Bladen	524	July 1*	1,123	416	28
Brunswick	1,066	July 1*	3,240	1,565	14
Buncombe	3,603	January 1	5,290	12,277	80
Burke	883	July 1*	2,172	1,663	56
Cabarrus	1,167	January 1	4,658	4,831	51
Caldwell	960	July 1*	2,079	1,053	34
Camden	60	July 1*	243	55	0
Carteret	678	July 1*	1,688	1,269	26
Caswell	273	July 1*	568	157	0
Catawba	2,123	January 1	3,977	5,592	58
Chatham	326	July 1*	1,445	545	30
Cherokee	289	July 1*	670	466	26
Chowan	231	July 1*	400	266	6
Clay	90	July 1*	230	81	0
Cleveland	1,833	July 1*	2,801	2,181	83
Columbus	621	July 1*	1,610	518	34
Craven	1,014	July 1*	2,376	2,106	59
Cumberland	4,835	July 1*	8,849	9,232	221
Currituck	91	July 1*	620	275	0
Dare	179	July 1*	1,023	954	0
Davidson	1,872	January 1	4,203	2,394	75
Davie	260	January 1	955	486	3
Duplin	408	July 1*	1,439	698	39
Durham	2,693	January 1	7,484	17,804	158
Edgecombe	1,318	July 1*	2,091	1,780	44
Forsyth	2,695	January 1	9,354	11,802	142

Franklin	633	July 1*	1,564	548	4
Gaston	3,193	January 1	5,705	3,729	92
Gates	87	July 1*	273	66	0
Graham	129	July 1*	317	93	0
Granville	376	July 1*	1,351	878	1
Greene	263	July 1*	522	137	0
Guilford	8,448	January 1	14,215	20,345	383
Halifax	1,112	July 1*	1,798	1,095	37
Harnett	1,201	July 1*	3,104	1,619	64
Haywood	696	January 1	1,326	1,150	53
Henderson	669	January 1	2,231	2,319	63
Hertford	418	July 1*	612	564	33
Hoke	746	July 1*	1,421	396	0
Hyde	60	July 1*	142	36	0
Iredell	659	January 1	4,159	4,936	30
Jackson	372	July 1*	971	730	85
Johnston	1,766	July 1*	4,267	2,298	64
Jones	173	July 1*	259	86	0
Lee	601	July 1*	1,781	1,511	128
Lenoir	924	July 1*	1,696	1,131	114
Lincoln	700	January 1	2,105	1,397	0
Macon	268	July 1*	818	667	0
Madison	227	July 1*	481	124	2
Martin	386	July 1*	720	299	36
McDowell	730	July 1*	1,091	606	37
Mecklenburg	10,086	January 1	28,684	64,979	551
Mitchell	132	July 1*	397	223	40
Montgomery	260	July 1*	620	260	43
Moore	506	July 1*	2,071	2,296	70
Nash	1,096	July 1*	3,097	924	46
New Hanover	2,266	January 1	5,766	7,632	62
Northampton	268	July 1*	588	197	0
Onslow	1,281	July 1*	3,652	3,723	45
Orange	809	January 1	3,144	5,085	18
Pamlico	150	July 1*	316	95	27
Pasquotank	421	July 1*	1,171	1,129	66
Pender	553	July 1*	1,467	558	0
Perquimans	168	July 1*	336	137	0
Person	476	July 1*	1,137	494	50
Pitt	1,899	July 1*	5,102	5,770	48
Polk	144	July 1*	433	170	0
Randolph	1,275	January 1	3,548	1,818	81
Richmond	1,022	July 1*	1,290	820	40
Robeson	2,814	July 1*	4,096	1,763	34
Rockingham	1,219	July 1*	2,607	1,339	36

Rowan	1,494	July 1*	3,586	2,770	69
Rutherford	952	July 1*	1,839	989	57
Sampson	566	July 1*	1,618	785	36
Scotland	749	July 1*	1,171	634	0
Stanly	565	July 1*	1,447	815	68
Stokes	359	July 1*	1,126	291	5
Surry	709	July 1*	1,705	1,389	54
Swain	163	July 1*	441	244	0
Transylvania	379	July 1*	690	505	3
Tyrrell	50	July 1*	125	83	0
Union	1,376	January 1	5,013	2,856	3
Vance	1,129	July 1*	1,468	1,069	67
Wake	4,186	January 1	23,753	52,010	37
Warren	361	July 1*	583	193	0
Washington	216	July 1*	403	164	1
Watauga	237	January 1	1,203	2,176	9
Wayne	1,841	July 1*	3,078	2,171	49
Wilkes	884	July 1*	1,602	975	81
Wilson	1,310	July 1*	3,452	2,183	51
Yadkin	265	January 1	816	486	2
Yancey	188	July 1*	395	158	0

SOURCE: Special Data Request to the Department of Health Human Services, July 2015; Total Unemployed and Job Openings for September 2015, NCWorks Online, Area Summary for All 100 Counties; WIOA Eligible Training reflect listings of training programs that could be eligible for WIOA financial support but which may cost the participant and in some cases the cost of a credential is more than \$7,000. Program listings accessed for each county at NCWorks Online.