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# Final Report

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*North Carolina's Felony SNAP Ban and Its Impacts on Food Insecurity, Student Educational Outcomes, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*

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# Table of Contents

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<b>Executive Summary</b> . . . . .	<b>03</b>
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	<b>04</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> . . . . .	<b>05</b>
<b>Methodology</b> . . . . .	<b>09</b>
<b>Findings</b> . . . . .	<b>12</b>
<b>Discussion</b> . . . . .	<b>16</b>
<b>Policy Recommendations</b> . . . . .	<b>18</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> . . . . .	<b>21</b>
<b>References</b> . . . . .	<b>22</b>

# Executive Summary

In North Carolina, individuals with felony drug convictions can be temporarily or permanently excluded from SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits. This exclusion impacts not only the individuals directly excluded by this policy but their children and families as well. This report investigates how North Carolina's felony SNAP ban contributes to food insecurity, negatively impacts children's educational outcomes, and increases their risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

Using a qualitative research design, responses were collected from 21 participants who either experienced the ban themselves, lived in a household impacted by it during childhood, or had relevant policy expertise. Thematic analysis revealed several key findings.

The research suggested that food insecurity was widespread among individuals excluded by the ban and those in their households. Additionally, the research suggested that many households excluded by the ban relied on unhealthy or unreliable means of accessing food to try to make ends meet. Further, the research suggested that food insecurity had a significant impact on the emotions, behaviors, and academic outcomes on students in excluded households. These patterns raise concerns about children's well-being and their exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline.

To address these issues, this report recommends increasing funding for food banks and creating school-based support programs for students in households

excluded by the ban as short-term policy recommendations. However, the most effective solution is for North Carolina policymakers to opt out of the felony SNAP ban altogether to promote food security, support reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals into society, and reduce systemic harm to children and families.



# Introduction

In North Carolina, one can be temporarily or permanently deemed ineligible to receive SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits (also known as food stamps) if he or she has a drug-related felony conviction (North Carolina Justice Center, n.d.). Formerly incarcerated individuals tend to be low-income, and welfare programs like SNAP are essential to allowing them to support themselves and their families as they try to integrate back into society. This policy can have an impact on the children of formerly incarcerated individuals and their ability to get an adequate education. Studies have shown that students struggling with food insecurity tend to perform worse academically compared to their counterparts with adequate food access (Cox et al., 2023). Studies have also shown that students struggling with food insecurity are more likely to face disciplinary action at school, increasing the students' chances of entering the school-to-prison pipeline (Jackson, 2021). This research looks at the intersections of food insecurity and felony drug convictions in North Carolina and examines the impact this has on students' educational outcomes and their risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

Given this information, the policy question for this research is: **how does the exclusion of individuals with drug-related felony convictions from SNAP eligibility impact their experiences with food insecurity in North Carolina and impact affected students' educational outcomes and increase their risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline.**

In the rest of the report, there will be a literature review section to examine previous research on the topic, a methodology section to explain how the research was conducted, a findings section to explain the key findings of the research, a discussion section to analyze the findings, a policy recommendations section, and a conclusion section.



# Literature Review

## Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (more commonly known as SNAP or food stamps) is a government program that provides financial assistance to families in need so they can purchase food. SNAP is a very crucial program as it helps provide money to low-income individuals so they can purchase food, and by doing this it also deters people from stealing or committing other crimes to make ends meet (Paresky, 2017). However, in North Carolina, individuals can be temporarily or permanently banned from SNAP eligibility if they have been convicted of a drug-related felony. For those who are formerly incarcerated and trying to re-integrate into society, this ban makes it more likely that they will be food insecure. Further, this impacts the food security of everyone in the household because they are not able to access SNAP resources at all or aren't able to get as much SNAP assistance with someone in the household being banned from eligibility. Research has shown that being food insecure can negatively impact students' educational outcomes and it also increases their likelihood of entering the school-to-prison pipeline. This literature review examines current literature and research on these topics and discusses the limitations of the already available research.

## Policy Background

In 1996, the United States federal government passed a law called the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996" as part of former

President Bill Clinton's push to reform the United States' welfare system (Paresky, 2017). One of the provisions of this bill introduced new welfare eligibility requirements that would permanently ban those with a drug-related felony conviction from being eligible for SNAP and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) benefits (Paresky, 2017). This provision was intended to act as a deterrent to decrease rates of drug use and drug-related crime. However, this bill also had a clause that allowed states to opt out partially or fully from implementing this ban. Currently, 34 states either fully or partially enforce the felony SNAP ban (McCalmont, 2013). Many states have opted to modify or remove the ban in recognition that this policy does not act as an effective deterrent against crime and drug use, doesn't effectively address substance use disorders, and creates more obstacles for formerly incarcerated individuals trying to reintegrate into society and reconnect with their community (CLASP, 2022).

One of the states that partially enforces the felony SNAP ban is North Carolina. In North Carolina, people with Class H and Class I felony drug convictions are banned from accessing TANF and SNAP benefits for at least six months and are required to fulfill certain requirements in order to regain eligibility (North Carolina Justice Center, n.d.). More specifically, temporarily excluded individuals are required to continuously participate in and/or complete a substance abuse program to regain eligibility (NC

# Literature Review

Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). However, those with drug convictions of a Class G or above are subjected to a lifetime ban from accessing SNAP and TANF benefits in North Carolina (North Carolina Justice Center, n.d.).

## **Policy Ramifications**

This policy has a huge impact on formerly incarcerated people who were convicted of a drug-related felony. As formerly incarcerated individuals try to reintegrate into society they must be able to provide for themselves and their families, and programs like SNAP and TANF are crucial for helping these individuals get back on their feet (CLASP, 2022). Ninety-one percent of people recently released from prison report experiencing food insecurity (CLASP, 2022). Further, research has found a positive and economically meaningful association between drug-related incarcerations and the likelihood of being classified as food insecure or very low food secure (McDonough & Millimet, 2019). Multiple studies have found that having access to SNAP and TANF services significantly reduces recidivism rates, with one study finding that SNAP and TANF access can reduce one's risk of being incarcerated again by up to 10 percent in one year (CLASP, 2022). Without access to these programs, there is a higher likelihood that formerly incarcerated individuals will turn to crime to secure food or other necessities for themselves and those in their households (McCalmont, 2013). A longitudinal study was done examining the change in recidivism rates among individuals convicted of drug

trafficking in Florida before and after the felony ban was put in place, and the study found that the SNAP ban increased recidivism rates among those convicted of drug trafficking by approximately 60 percent (Tuttle, 2019). Further, the study found that the increase in recidivism rates was primarily driven by an increase in recidivism for financially motivated crimes (Tuttle, 2019). Overall, the available literature shows that the felony SNAP ban is a significant barrier for those with felony drug convictions trying to achieve food security as they reintegrate into society. Additionally, evidence from these studies point to this ban as a possible cause of increased recidivism rates.

Beyond the impact this policy has on those who have been convicted of a drug-related felony, it also impacts those in these individuals' households. Although formerly incarcerated individuals can still apply for SNAP and TANF benefits for their children and any other dependents, the household overall still receives less assistance because of the ban (CLASP, 2022). In the United States, 3.8 million households with children are considered food insecure and 6.8 million households with children are considered very low food secure (McDonough & Millimet, 2019). Research has found that parental incarceration is associated with an increased probability of food insecurity in households with children (McDonough & Millimet, 2019). Further, research has indicated that there is evidence that drug-related incarceration contributes to

# Literature Review

very low food security and SNAP can be a significant mediator to this issue (McDonough & Millimet, 2019).

These impacts stretch outside of the household and into the classroom for many children in these food insecure households. Research has shown that household food insecurity is negatively correlated with math grades and school attendance (Chowa & Masa, 2020). In studies, teachers have noted decreased academic performance in children who were experiencing hunger (No Kid Hungry, 2023). Further, research has shown that childhood hunger can negatively impact children's cognitive development (No Kid Hungry, 2023). Longitudinal studies on childhood hunger have concluded that children's learning outcomes are worse when they routinely experience hunger and almost all aspects of physical and mental function are negatively impacted as well (No Kid Hungry, 2023). Moreover, research has found that food insecurity negatively affects a child's concentration, memory, mood, and motor skills, which are all necessary for him or her to be successful in school (No Kid Hungry, 2023).

In addition to negatively impacting academic outcomes, students in food insecure households may also be more likely to be sucked into the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline is a phenomenon where children are systematically pressured out of society and into the criminal justice system via exclusionary punishment in schools (Chowa & Masa, 2020). The school-to-prison pipeline is also known for disproportionately

negatively impacting students of color (Chowa & Masa, 2020). Research has shown that children dealing with hunger may have a harder time making and interacting with friends, maintaining self-control, and/or listening to instructions (No Kid Hungry, 2023). Studies have also shown that students in food insecure households are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline in school like suspension and expulsion (Jackson, 2021). One study found that children in preschool who lived in food insecure households were significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled (Jackson, 2021). Additionally, the study found that 1 in 4 children in preschool with a previous suspension or expulsion on their record came from households experiencing food insecurity (Jackson, 2021). The study concludes that children from food insecure households are punished disproportionately in schools and this can trigger a downward spiral leading toward future contact with the criminal justice system (Jackson, 2021).

## Limitations of Current Literature

There is quite a bit of published research on the felony SNAP ban, how the ban contributes to food insecurity, and how food insecurity impacts educational outcomes as well as the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, the findings of the research that has been published thus far have been consistent and non-contradictory. However, the research on these topics is segmented. Thus far, there has not been any published research that looks at the intersections of the felony SNAP

# Literature Review

ban with childhood hunger, children's educational outcomes, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, most of the research on the felony SNAP ban focuses on how the ban impacts food security for the person with the drug-related felony conviction, but there is substantially less research examining how the ban impacts the rest of that person's household. Further, the felony SNAP ban is different across the country because states have the option to opt out of it. Therefore, since the specifics of the felony SNAP ban are different from state to state, there is a need for more state-level research to be done on the impacts of the felony SNAP ban. Overall, the limitations of the current research on these topics illustrates the need for research that evaluates the state level impacts of the drug-related felony SNAP ban policy, research that more closely examines the impacts on the felony SNAP ban on the rest of one's household, and research that looks at the intersections of food insecurity as a result of the felony SNAP ban on children's educational outcomes and their vulnerability to the school-to-prison pipeline.

## Conclusion

Overall, research thus far on these topics has indicated that the felony SNAP ban increases recidivism rates and increases rates of food insecurity for households impacted by the ban. Further, research has shown that being food insecure has a negative impact on a child's educational outcomes and makes them more vulnerable to the school-to-prison pipeline. However, research on these topics is fragmented, illustrating a gap in research that can be filled with more comprehensive and intersectional research on these topics.



# Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the impact of North Carolina's felony SNAP ban on food insecurity, affected children's educational outcomes, and affected children's risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline. A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study to better capture the lived experiences and perspectives of affected individuals and experts in the field.

To recruit participants, I shared a flyer asking for respondents who fit the eligibility criteria to sign up for an interview and asked others in my community to share the flyer as well. Additionally, North Carolina-based advocacy organizations such as NC Justice Center and the NC Harm Reduction Coalition shared the flyer with their networks. Further, I reached out to local food banks in the North Carolina research triangle area and shared the recruitment flyer with them so they could share it with their networks. Participants were incentivized with \$50 gift cards to participate in the research and were given the option to provide their contact information to be shared with NC Justice Center to coordinate receipt of the gift cards. Providing contact information was optional and all contact information was shared with NC Justice Center separate from the final responses to ensure all responses remained anonymous. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify individuals who fit the eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria for this research specified that participants should fit at least one of the following criteria: the individual had been excluded by North Carolina's felony SNAP ban and had at least one child aged

5-17 years old in the household with them at the time, the individual was a child aged 5-17 when they were in a household impacted or excluded by the felony SNAP ban, or the individual was an expert on criminal justice, education, and/or food insecurity. To center the experiences of those personally impacted by the felony SNAP ban, the findings of this research primarily come from directly excluded individuals and individuals who were children in excluded households. The responses collected from experts are used to provide context on the findings derived from directly impacted respondents. Responses were collected from 21 individuals; 14 of them were individuals who had been excluded by the felony SNAP ban, 5 of them were individuals who were aged 5-17 while living in a household impacted by the felony SNAP ban, and 2 of them were experts.

Respondents were invited to participate in the study by either completing an interview or a survey. Both formats covered the same core topics, with questions tailored to each respondent based on the specific eligibility criteria they met. Individuals who had been personally excluded from SNAP due to a drug-related felony conviction were asked about their background experiences with the policy, its impact on their food security and daily life, the educational outcomes and disciplinary experiences of children in their household while being excluded by the ban, and their perspectives on the felony SNAP ban along with any recommendations they have for policy change. Respondents who were

# Methodology

between the ages of 5 and 17 while living in a household affected by the felony SNAP ban were asked about their personal experiences, the impact of the policy on their food access and daily life, its influence on their educational performance, behavioral outcomes, and exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline, as well as their own views on the policy and suggestions for improvement. Questions asked to the experts were tailored depending on the respondent's indicated area of expertise.

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the responses collected from participants. After reading through the responses initially, transcripts were coded inductively by hand. I went through the responses, highlighting key information in the quotes and grouping these responses into codes. After completing that step, I grouped the codes under larger themes found in the data.

Participants gave informed consent prior to starting the interview or the survey. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes with consent from the participant. All participants were assured of their anonymity and right to withdraw from the study at any time. All questions on the survey were optional, so participants were not forced to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. All data was stored securely to keep responses confidential.

As a student researcher conducting this project as part of my Master of Public Policy capstone, I approached this work with a strong interest in social justice and public

welfare policy, particularly in understanding the systemic barriers faced by individuals with criminal records. While I do not have personal experience with food insecurity or direct connections to the communities excluded by North Carolina's felony SNAP ban, during my undergraduate studies I volunteered with the food pantry on my campus, which provided food assistance to students, staff, and faculty. That experience sparked my interest in food access as a critical policy issue and deepened my awareness of how food insecurity can affect individuals across different backgrounds.

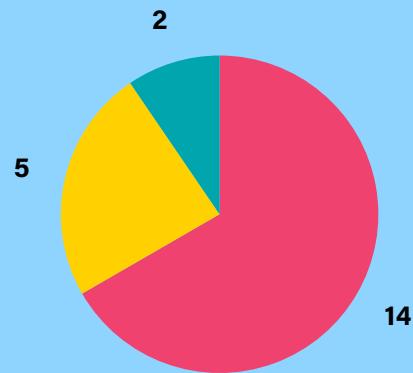
I recognize that my background and positionality as someone who does not have any personal experience with food insecurity or felony disenfranchisement may influence how I interpret the narratives shared by participants. To minimize bias, I designed my interview and survey questions to be open-ended and participant-led to ensure that respondents could speak freely about their own experiences and perspectives. Although I am an outsider to the communities impacted by this policy and interviewed in this study, I have worked to approach this research with care, humility, and a commitment to amplifying the voices of those participating in the study.

While this study offers important insights into the effects of North Carolina's felony SNAP ban, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small ( $n=21$ ), and participants were selected through purposive sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the

# Methodology

findings. Also, responses relied on self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by recall bias or personal interpretation. Moreover, while this study does include multiple perspectives, the geographic scope was limited to North Carolina. Since state SNAP policies vary, findings may not fully reflect conditions in other states and cannot be generalized to other states with felony SNAP ban policies. Finally, as a student researcher without lived experience of food insecurity or felony disenfranchisement, my positionality may influence the interpretation of the responses, despite efforts to center the voices of respondents and minimize bias through open-ended, participant-led data collection.

## Participant Demographics



- Excluded Individuals
- Children in Excluded Households
- Experts



# Findings

## Finding 1: Running Out of Food

One of the first major themes found in the data was that participants consistently noted running out of food before they were able to buy more. Over 90% of respondents who were excluded by the felony SNAP ban reported running out of food "sometimes", "most of the time", or "always". Additionally, 100% of the respondents that were children who lived in a household excluded by the SNAP ban reported the frequency of running out of food while being impacted by the SNAP ban as "most of the time". Many respondents expressed feeling "helpless" because they aren't able to fully able to provide for their families and ensure their households have enough food. One of the respondents noted that her income was "well below the income limits for SNAP" and that her income was not enough to support herself and her children. However, due to the SNAP ban, she said she "struggle[s] to obtain enough food," to last herself and her family. This finding suggests that there may be a real need among those excluded by the felony SNAP ban to access SNAP benefits so they have enough food to feed themselves and those in their households.

*"My income is not nearly enough to support me and my children. It is well below the income limits for SNAP. Yet myself and my children struggle to obtain enough food (especially healthy meals) to last us."*

*- Directly Excluded Respondent*

# Findings

## Finding 2: Use of Alternative Strategies

Another major theme found in the data was the use of alternative strategies to obtain enough food for those in the household. Of the participants who were directly excluded by the felony SNAP ban, 57% of them reported utilizing food banks to ensure themselves and their families had enough to eat. However, multiple respondents noted that the resources at food banks are limited and not always reliable. Further, an overwhelming 93% of excluded individuals reported borrowing food from friends and family to help ensure there was enough food in the household for themselves and their families. Moreover, 93% of respondents excluded by the felony SNAP ban reported skipping meals due to financial struggles while being excluded by the ban. One respondent said there are "many days where I eat nothing" as she prioritizes feeding her children over feeding herself. Respondents also frequently mentioned choosing between necessities and buying unhealthy food as other strategies they used to try to obtain enough food to feed themselves and those in their household during times where they were excluded by the felony SNAP ban. This finding suggests that those excluded by the felony SNAP ban are typically forced to find other ways to provide enough food for themselves and their families, but these alternative strategies being used to get food are not always reliable or healthy.

*"I've had to rely on food banks and local charities to get by, but those resources are limited, and it's hard to provide a stable and nutritious food environment for my family. It's heartbreaking to see my kids go without the food they need to thrive."*

*- Directly Excluded Respondent*

# Findings

## Finding 3: Emotional and Academic Impact

Another major finding from the data was that the food insecurity experienced by households during periods of exclusion from SNAP due to the felony ban had a significant impact on children's emotional well-being and academic performance. Over 70% of respondents who had been excluded by the ban noted that the children in their households struggled academically during the period of SNAP ineligibility. Additionally, 100% of respondents that were children in households affected by the felony SNAP ban reported that they felt food insecurity had an impact on their long-term educational and behavioral outcomes (n=5). Participants frequently described children showing signs of anxiety, difficulty sleeping, depression, self-isolation, and insecurity about the family's circumstances. Further, both respondents directly excluded by the felony SNAP ban and those who were children in such households expressed that the children had trouble concentrating and staying focused in school during times when the household was being excluded by the felony SNAP ban. This finding suggests that the food insecurity students are experiencing while their households are being impacted by the felony SNAP ban is having a negative impact on their performance in school as well as their mental and emotional health.

*"I've noticed some changes in my kids' behavior and emotions. They seem more anxious and stressed, especially when they're hungry or when we're struggling to make ends meet. They'll sometimes act out or get irritable, and it's hard to calm them down.*

*My youngest kid has also started having trouble sleeping at night, and I think it's because they're worried about food or our situation."*

*- Directly Excluded Respondent*

# Findings

## Finding 4: Disciplinary Action

Another key finding from the research was that a significant amount of respondents noted themselves or someone else in the household facing disciplinary action while being excluded by the ban. Of the respondents that were children in households impacted by the felony SNAP ban, 80% of them reported themselves or someone else in their households facing disciplinary action during periods when the household was excluded by the SNAP ban. Further, 100% of these respondents also reported feeling isolated or excluded at school during times when they were experiencing food insecurity as a result of the felony SNAP ban. When asked about behavioral or emotional changes in the children of the household while being excluded by the felony SNAP ban, one participant said, "My youngest child especially has started exhibiting major behavioral issues, including swearing, aggressiveness, hostility, violence, [and] extreme anxiety." This finding suggests that as a result of the food insecurity experienced by households during periods of being excluded from SNAP eligibility, students are more likely to face disciplinary action, putting them at an increased risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

*"My youngest child has started exhibiting major behavioral issues, including swearing, aggressiveness, hostility, violence, [and] extreme anxiety."*

*- Directly Excluded Respondent*

# Discussion

The key findings from this research highlight critical policy issues regarding the impact of North Carolina's felony SNAP ban. An overwhelming majority of respondents reported experiencing chronic food insecurity during times when their households were excluded by the SNAP ban. The data strongly suggest that North Carolina's felony SNAP ban deprives already vulnerable communities of a vital safety net policy, resulting in a consistent inability to access sufficient food for the directly excluded individuals and their households. This could have serious implications for the felony SNAP ban as well as other food security policy because it shows that the current ban exacerbates economic instability and hunger for the affected populations.

Additionally, respondents' widespread reliance on food banks, borrowing from friends and family, skipping meals, and choosing to purchase cheaper, unhealthy food points to the inadequacy and unsustainability of the alternative methods affected households are using to try to achieve food security in the absence of SNAP benefits. Personally affected respondents as well as expert interviewees noted that charitable food assistance programs such as food banks are not equipped to serve as long-term substitutes for SNAP benefits. This finding suggests that the felony SNAP ban poses a major obstacle for affected communities when trying to reintegrate into society and support themselves and their households. Further, the other methods that individuals excluded by the ban are using to try to obtain enough food for themselves and

their households are typically unreliable or unhealthy, putting already vulnerable individuals in an even worse position.

The findings also suggested that the food insecurity households experienced while being excluded by the felony SNAP ban had an impact on the emotional well-being and academic performance of the children in these affected households. Respondents reported that children in affected households experienced a wide range of behavioral and mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and difficulty concentrating in school. These emotional burdens were oftentimes compounded by poor academic performance and disciplinary incidents, which were described by several participants as worsening during periods of SNAP exclusion. These findings suggest an intersection between food insecurity, education, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

From a policy perspective, these findings underscore the need to reconsider the long-term costs of North Carolina's felony SNAP ban. The exclusion of individuals with a drug-related felony conviction from food assistance programs doesn't just impact them—it also impacts their entire households, particularly impacting children's physical and emotional well-being as well as their educational outcomes. By increasing the risk of school discipline and social exclusion for children in households excluded by the felony SNAP ban, the ban may contribute to patterns of criminalization among youth, undermining

# Discussion

broader goals of equity, rehabilitation, and public safety.

Overall, these findings suggest that the felony SNAP ban is a counterproductive policy that continues to perpetuate cycles of poverty, food insecurity, and systemic inequality. The impacts of this policy stretch far beyond just not providing food assistance to individuals with drug-related felony convictions, it also has an impact on public health, child welfare, and criminal justice reform. The draconian impacts of the felony SNAP ban illustrate a need for policy interventions that address these issues.



# Policy Recommendations

## Short-Term Recommendation 1

This report puts forth short-term and long-term policy recommendations to fully address the issue. The short-term and long-term policy recommendations should be enacted in conjunction with one another to ensure the issue is addressed comprehensively. The first short-term recommendation is to increase the funding for food banks and other charitable food assistance resources to ensure that individuals excluded by the ban have a more consistent and reliable method of achieving food security for their households in the absence of SNAP benefits. North Carolina food banks have seen a sharp increase in demand since the end of SNAP emergency allotments, yet they are facing significant funding cuts with \$11.4 million lost for food banks in 2025 and 2026 (Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina, n.d.). This loss is expected to reduce access to nutritious food for struggling families, making state-level funding essential to help fill that gap (Piggott, 2025). While being banned from SNAP eligibility, it is important that excluded individuals have other reliable means of accessing food that is sufficient to meet the nutritional needs of their households.



# Policy Recommendations

## Short-Term Recommendation 2

When respondents who were children in households affected by the felony SNAP ban were asked what policy recommendations they had for ameliorating the issues they faced with food insecurity, their physical and mental health, and their school-to-prison pipeline risk, many respondents indicated an interest in having programs at schools for students in their situation to receive extra assistance. Based on this, the second short-term policy recommendation is to create programs in schools for students in households affected by this policy to receive extra counseling and food assistance. These programs would offer extra counseling for students in households impacted by this policy as well as food assistance, especially before extended breaks from school such as winter or summer break. Studies have shown that food insecurity in children is linked to negative mental and behavioral outcomes, and this is consistent with the findings in this research as well (Hanks, n.d.). Research has shown that maximizing participation in federal child nutrition programs and providing afterschool meals can reduce disciplinary incidents and buffer the negative impacts of household food insecurity on children's mental health (Hanks, n.d.). Therefore, this policy is necessary to help reduce the negative impact of food insecurity from the felony SNAP ban on children in excluded households.



# Policy Recommendations

## Long-Term Recommendation

The long-term policy recommendation is for North Carolina policymakers to opt out of the felony SNAP ban. Research has shown that denying SNAP benefits to people with felony drug convictions increases food insecurity, worsens health outcomes, and is associated with higher recidivism rates (Morrow & Payne, 2020). Research has also shown that access to SNAP reduces the likelihood of individuals re-offending and supports successful reentry by improving affected individuals' financial stability and health (Morrow & Payne, 2020). Additionally, studies have found that states that have already opted out of the felony SNAP ban have not seen negative fiscal impacts and have improved outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals re-entering society (Morrow & Payne, 2020). National organizations and public health experts overwhelmingly recommend for the felony SNAP ban to be removed to address the root causes of hunger and recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals (Iwuala, 2024). The findings of this research make it clear that North Carolina's felony SNAP ban has an immensely negative impact not only on individuals with drug-related felony convictions, but also on those in their households. While the short-term recommendations offer helpful ways to support communities experiencing food insecurity as a result of the felony SNAP ban, the most effective policy option would be to eliminate the ban altogether to ensure everyone has more equitable access to food.



# Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this research suggest that North Carolina's felony SNAP ban has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond the excluded individuals and into their families, the classroom, and the broader community. The research suggests that food insecurity experienced by households excluded by the SNAP ban negatively impacts the children of these household's physical and mental health, educational outcomes, and school-to-prison pipeline risk. Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that policy interventions are necessary to properly address these issues. This report recommends two short term policy recommendations to be enacted alongside a long-term policy recommendation to comprehensively address the issues created by the felony SNAP ban. This paper recommends increased funding for food banks and other charitable food assistance programs as well as the creation of programs in schools for children in households affected by the felony SNAP ban to receive extra food assistance and counseling as the short-term policy recommendations. However, these short-term policy recommendations do not address the root cause of the issue. The long-term policy recommendation put forth in this report is for North Carolina policymakers to opt out of the felony SNAP ban. These policies should be put into effect to ensure equitable food access for all and improved outcomes for individuals excluded by the felony SNAP ban and their families.



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