



CHELLIE PINGREE
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
1ST DISTRICT, MAINE

April 2, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I am writing to express my significant concerns about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed rule, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents." Based on experiences in my home state of Maine, I believe this proposed rule is misguided and ignores the complexities of food insecurity.


In 2014, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services announced that it would no longer waive the work requirement for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), meaning the state would impose a 3-month time limit on benefits for ABAWD recipients. Since Maine instituted this policy change in early 2015, over 9,000 Mainers have lost access to SNAP benefits. Meanwhile, the prevalence of food insecurity in Maine has actually worsened. According to USDA, in 2015 when food insecurity dropped to 12.7 percent of households nationwide, food insecurity in Maine increased to 15.8 percent. Additionally, one in five children in Maine experiences food insecurity.

The standard for ABAWD waivers should be flexible, because states need to respond to food insecurity in ways that work for them. Furthermore, ABAWDs are a complex population. Imposing a one-size-fits-all solution on to all states ignores the lack of transportation to job trainings in our rural communities, the difficulty individuals can have in certifying disabling conditions without regular access to health care, and the disruption that homelessness and mental health can have on every aspect of someone's life. Many of the ABAWDs who have been affected by Maine's policies are military veterans, and it is unfathomable to deny food to those who have served our country.

I believe that access to food is a fundamental right and am very concerned that this proposed rule will only perpetuate food insecurity in Maine and across the country. My state has learned some difficult lessons as a result of its imposition of the three-month time limit, namely that this policy change does not magically create jobs nor does it reduce food insecurity. I do not want this proposed rule to foreclose the opportunity for Maine or other states to pursue ABAWD waivers in the future.

I urge you to withdraw the proposed rule affecting ABAWDs immediately. Thank you and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chellie Pingree', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress