



Regulatory Reform at a Glance

Proposed Rule: SNAP Requirements for ABAWDs

The Issue

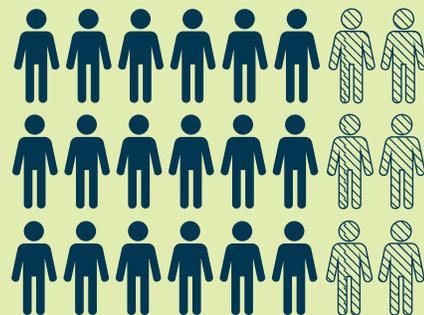
In December 2018, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published a proposed rule entitled “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents”. This action supports the Agency’s commitment to self-sufficiency by more broadly applying SNAP’s work-related program standards for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs).

The Background

SNAP rules limit participation by ABAWDs to 3 months in a 36-month period unless the individual is working or participating in a work program for at least 80 hours per month. The law allows states to waive these limits in areas where sufficient jobs are not available.

However, nearly half of ABAWDs receiving SNAP now live in waived areas, despite the booming economy and low unemployment. The Department’s view is that waivers are intended to provide temporary relief to the time limit while areas face poor economic conditions and should be used accordingly.

In 2016, there were 3.8 million individual ABAWDs on the SNAP rolls, with 2.8 million (nearly 74%) not working.



Summary of Proposed Changes

The proposed rule would reform waiver standards to better target areas that lack job opportunities by:



Improving Geographic Focus

- Eliminate state-wide waivers unless a state qualifies for extended unemployment benefits.
- Limit waivers of larger geographic areas that may include sections with sufficient available jobs.
- Allow waivers in local areas with high unemployment relative to the national average only when the local rate meets a specific quantitative standard—7%.



Strengthening Criteria for Approval

- Retain the statutory waiver standard—unemployment above 10% for a recent 12 month period.
- Eliminate Labor Surplus Areas as a criterion.
- Limit the duration of waivers to ensure that they reflect current economic conditions.
- Increase consistency by requiring the use of standardized data to support waivers except in areas where it may not be available, such as Indian reservations and U.S. territories.



Increasing Administrative Efficiency

- Set clear, robust, and quantitative standards for allowable waivers.
- Define specific circumstances when non-standardized data can be used to support waiver requests, and appropriate alternatives.
- Ensure full endorsement by State government before waivers are considered.



Ending the “Carryover” of ABAWD Exemptions

- Under the law, States receive exemptions from time limits for a portion of their caseload that they may use to extend eligibility for a limited number of ABAWDs. States have discretion on whether or not to use the exemptions available to them in a given year.
- Current regulations allow States to accumulate these exemptions year after year. If States do not use the exemptions they have earned, it leads to a large build-up of exemptions.
- The proposed rule would stop these exemptions from carrying over and accumulating indefinitely.