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Leveraging SNAP to improve worker skills

A new pathway to education and training for Ohio

Ohio ranks sixth in the nation for people living with food insecurity. Amidst this crisis, state policymakers increased work search and work requirements for SNAP benefits, the supplemental nutrition assistance program once known as food stamps. A new report from Policy Matters Ohio outlines a pathway to expand education and training resources available to SNAP recipients that does not risk access to food.

The report urges Ohio to participate in the federal SNAP to Skills program, which highlights how states can use federal 50 percent reimbursement grants (“50-50 funds”) to expand education and training resources for SNAP recipients. The report also notes the importance of choice. Model SNAP to Skill programs are voluntary and do not require participation to receive food assistance have better returns for all stakeholders.

“Securing work that pays enough to eliminate the need for food assistance is a high bar in our low-wage economy; adding meaningful education and training into the mix would help,” report author Hannah Halbert said. “Voluntary SNAP to Skills programs have two goals: to ensure the hungry are fed and for those who can benefit, provide education and training that can help reduce need.”

Ahead of tomorrow’s hearing, report author Hannah Halbert submitted testimony to the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee for Health and Human Services about the program.

SNAP works in Ohio. It reduced the share of participants living in deep poverty by 10 percentage points and increased the share living above the poverty line by 10 percentage points. Regardless of the intent of the state’s new work requirements, they are unlikely to increase participants’ self-sufficiency. Nearly one-third of Ohio jobs pay a median wage that would not keep a family of four out of poverty. Ohio is the 33rd worst state for the share of work paying poverty wages.

“It can be shocking to learn that in a nation with so much wealth many people skip meals or go hungry because they don’t have money to afford food,” said Halbert. “Food assistance means more children, elderly and people with disabilities can afford to eat.”

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*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute
with offices in Cleveland and Columbus*