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## Ohio should do more to reduce hunger, help job seekers

Ohio had rejected an opportunity to expand federal food aid to struggling residents statewide in 2014-2015, but the state should take advantage of another opportunity next year to help needy residents in dozens of cities and counties.

While Ohio will no longer qualify for a waiver of time limits on federal food aid on a statewide basis, the state could seek a waiver in up to 34 counties and nine cities next year, helping thousands who struggle in the slow recovery.

A new report from Policy Matters Ohio reviews Ohio's failure to maximize resources of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food assistance) for many job seekers in the past two years, particularly those who live in cities.

When the economy is strong, the federal government places time limits on food aid for men and women who are not disabled, elderly or parents with custody of minor children. These people are eligible for federal food aid in just three out of 36 months unless they get 80 hours of work a month (about 20 hours a week). When a state or local economy is weak and many can't find a job in three months or get the required number of work hours, federal rules waive the time limits. Ohio has qualified for a statewide waiver since the recession.

"The waiver could have been statewide, and the majority of job seekers affected by the time limits live in urban counties," said Wendy Patton, report author. "Yet the Kasich administration accepted it only for rural counties: 16 of Ohio's 88 counties in 2014 and 17 in 2015.

Hunger in Ohio, as measured by demand in Ohio's food banks, rose by 40 percent between 2010 and 2014. Ohio ranks 12<sup>th</sup> among the states in overall food insecurity and ties with Mississippi for 3d place in terms of severe food insecurity.

"Next year Ohio will not be eligible for a statewide waiver, but many counties and cities will," said Patton. "The Kasich administration should apply for the broadest waiver possible and maximize federal food aid for hungry Ohioans throughout the state."

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