

Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Conaway, and my fellow members of the House Committee on Agriculture, I thank you for holding today's hearing and for extending the opportunity to testify. Today, I'm here to speak on an issue that you all know is one of my strongest passions-- the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

As much as I wish I was here to speak on the positive strides we've made as a country in this area, lately it seems that things are regressing rather than progressing. In the past 12 months alone, the President and his Administration have proposed **three** rules that will further disadvantage this country's under resourced and underprivileged.

The first of these rules was proposed in On December 20, 2018, and would restrict a states' ability to waive the three month SNAP participation time limit for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (known as ABAWDS).

Under current regulations, an individual can only participate in SNAP for 3 months in a 36-month period, unless they average working at least 20-hours per week. States, however, were given limited flexibility to waive this time limit in areas where there were not sufficient jobs. Last week, however, on December 4th, the Trump Administration finalized this rule to further restrict state flexibility-- with the effect of over 750,000 Americans being kicked off of SNAP and thrown further into the depths of food insecurity.

According to USDA, the finalization of this change will help ABAWDS "*restore self-sufficiency through the dignity of work.*"

What's particularly upsetting about their statement is that it further generalizes and stigmatizes ABAWDS as people who simply don't work, and further, it implies that USDA has enough data about ABAWDS to even make that kind of a generalization, when in reality, they don't.

On February 27, 2019, Secretary Sonny Perdue appeared before the Agriculture Committee. During the hearing, I asked him if there was any specific research that FNS used to justify the rule change-- but what I received in response was a lot of information condemning this population, rather than information aimed at understanding the situation.

What I don't think the Trump Administration understands about ABAWDS is that they are an extremely complex group. According to witnesses from the Nutrition Subcommittee's ABAWDS hearing in April, this group includes veterans, young adults who have aged out of the foster care system, ex-felons who were products of mass incarceration, and workers who either aren't given 20-hours of work per week or fall just below the threshold. USDA only has access to limited information on SNAP participants-- and that's part of the problem. Age, ethnicity, and citizenship status doesn't tell the whole story.

What I think they're failing to recognize is that the overwhelming majority of SNAP participants who **can** work **do** work, but often in jobs that are either unstable or that pay so little that they *still* qualify for SNAP. So it's not that ABAWDS are jobless by choice—many are jobless because they lack opportunity and they are trying to get on their feet.

In addition to stigmatizing struggling families, the finalization of this rule goes against the will of congress by imposing restrictions that were *specifically* rejected for inclusion in the Farm Bill signed into law just last year. Instead of listening to us, and allowing us to do the jobs we've been sent here to do, the President has sidestepped our authority-- yet again-- to push his own political agenda

President Trump and his Administration have said that the proposed rule is about “work-work-work” but we all know what this really is: it’s a call to rally up extremism and stigmatize low-income households. This is a rule that is trying to “solve” problems that don’t exist—and it’s putting our most vulnerable citizens at a further disadvantage. We can’t stand by and let things like this happen.

That is why I urge you and the members of this committee to raise these issues to the forefront of our agenda, and to oppose any attempts this Administration makes to overburden struggling people and families.

Food for the hungry shouldn’t have a time limit.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Conaway, thank you again, and for the opportunity to address the committee on this matter. I yield the rest of my time.