

Policy Brief: Partial Ban on S.N.A.P. Benefits for People Who Have Committed Drug Felonies

Introduction

Currently in Nevada, when someone in need is looking for food assistance, they can apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, S.N.A.P. This is the case for everyone except those convicted of a drug felony. If someone is convicted of a drug felony within the past 20 years, they must provide documentation that they went to an approved treatment center for the abuse of controlled substances before qualifying for S.N.A.P.

Background

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act as part of the Welfare Reform of 1996. The passing of this reform placed bans on the benefits being given to convicted drug felons seeking assistance for S.N.A.P and T.A.N.I.F. However, in 21 U.S.C. 862a there is a provision that allows states to opt out or modify the ban without any reduction in funding (Hager, 2016). States have the choice of either implementing a full ban, meaning no benefits for drug felons, opting-out of the ban or implementing a partial ban. With a partial ban, like in Nevada, someone convicted of a drug felony can receive S.N.A.P benefits only if the recipient complies with regulations such as; complying with parole, not committing a second offense, enrolling in treatment, etc. (Hager, 2016). The state of Nevada requires someones convicted of a drug felony, within the past 20 years to provide a certification proving completion of a 30-day rehabilitation class before applying for benefits.

Scope of Problem

When a person is already seeking assistance, they have limited resources. It is often not possible for these people to have access to obtain the needed documentation to apply for benefits. Nevada expects documentation of treatments completed in other states as well. It is extremely difficult for this population to obtain the required documentation to qualify for S.N.A.P benefits.

This partial ban can also affect the children of parents with drug felony convictions. Often times, the child will receive S.N.A.P benefits and it will have to be split among the family.

Lifting the ban on drug felons access will assist drug felons at reintegrating into society. This can allow them to feed themselves and their families which can lower their chances of resorting back to crime.

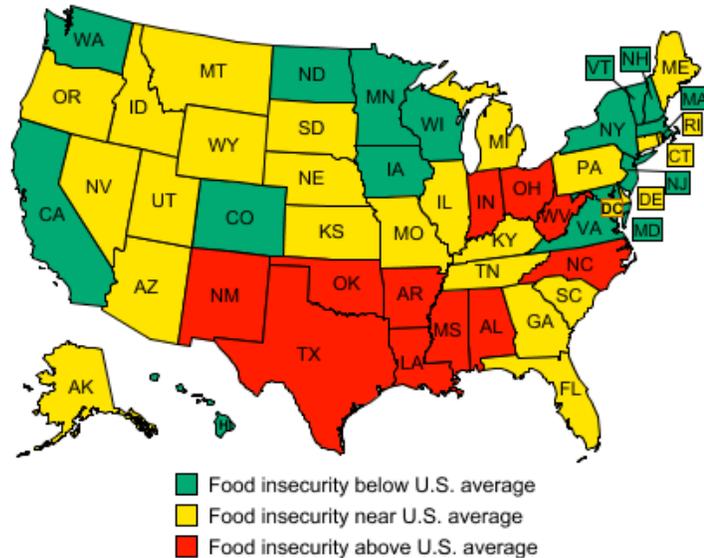
-20 States have completely opted out of the ban
-24 States implement a partial ban
-6 States implement a full ban

Why it Matters

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the states with food insecurity above the U.S. average are; New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Among these states, 73% of them implement some type of ban on drug felons receiving S.N.A.P benefits if not a full ban.



Prevalence of food insecurity, average 2015-17



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from the December 2015, 2016, and 2017 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

Top Food Insecure States in the U.S.

1. 14.3 % of Texas households are considered food insecure. They currently implement a partial ban.
2. 1 in 6 people in Arkansas struggle with hunger. They implement a complete ban on drug felons receiving S.N.A.P. benefits.
3. 20.1% of Louisiana households struggle to put food on the table. Louisiana implements a partial ban.
4. In Mississippi, 600,840 people are struggling with hunger - and of them 176,580 are children. Mississippi has a complete ban on drug felons receiving S.N.A.P.
5. In Alabama, 19.2% of their population is considered food insecure. This state has a partial ban in place.
6. 1 in 7 people living in Indiana struggle with hunger. In this state, there is a complete ban on drug felons receiving S.N.A.P.
7. West Virginia suffers from a food insecurity rate of 15.3%. West Virginia also has a complete ban on S.N.A.P. benefits.
8. In North Carolina, 1,565,910 people are struggling with hunger - and of them 479,220 are children. North Carolina has a partial ban on drug

felons seeking S.N.A.P. assistance.

As you can see, a majority of the states that are considered to have food insecurity above the national average have a partial ban on drug felons receiving S.N.A.P. benefits like Nevada does.

Recommendation

In order to work towards ending food insecurity in Nevada, where one in every six people are considered food insecure, then we must remove the requirement of presenting the certification of completing a treatment program in order to allow more people access to food assistance.

