



Cook County Commissioner Alma Anaya
Cook County Building
118 N Clark St
Chicago, IL 60602

January 15, 2020

Re: Comment in Support of Proposed Resolution 20-1209

Dear Commissioner Anaya and Honorable Members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners,

The Chicago Jobs Council writes to support the adoption of Proposed Resolution 20-1209, a Resolution in Response to the Risk of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits Losses for Residents of Cook County. As the Resolution clearly outlines, tens of thousands of Cook County residents may soon lose SNAP benefits as a result of the forced implementation of strict federal work requirements for people on SNAP who are considered "Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs.) These federal regulations require that ABAWDs work or participate in qualifying education or training activities for 80 hours per month as a condition of receiving SNAP beyond 3 months every 36 months.

Taking away someone's food does not help them get a job. On the contrary, it causes hunger and hinders their ability to live a healthy and productive life. We at the Chicago Jobs Council staunchly oppose federal efforts to attach work requirements to food, housing, or other critical types of public assistance. As such, we are concerned that implementation of the ABAWD work requirement for SNAP in Cook County puts our neighbors at risk of hunger, and fails to provide them with resources to connect to family-sustaining employment. This policy will have a huge impact on Cook County, where an estimated 50,000 people could be subject to strict federal work requirements.

The Jobs Council has decades of experience in the field of workforce development. We know without a doubt that forced hunger and punishments do not help job seekers overcome barriers to employment and self-sufficiency. We also know what does work: evidence-based workforce development programs and supportive wraparound services. Unfortunately, we do not have enough of those services to go around for all who need them.

We believe this policy will be harmful to low-income job seekers, our government agencies, and our economy as a whole:

- Many so-called ABAWDs face significant barriers that prevent them from easily connecting to employment. Taking their food away will not make it easier for them to find and keep work. This policy change will increase hunger, not employment.

- Our state faces a drastic shortage in workforce development services - between our SNAP E&T program and WIOA-funded workforce system, we estimate fewer than 20,000 workforce program slots statewide. In contrast, there are over 100,000 ABAWDs in Illinois. These services are already at capacity and cannot manage an influx of tens of thousands of ABAWDs.
- Administering this time limit will be extremely complex and place heavy administrative burdens on an already overwhelmed local IDHS offices.
- Finally, as has happened in other states where this policy has been implemented, many thousands of Cook County residents will likely lose food benefits, meaning fewer dollars circulating in our local economies and more Illinoisans facing food insecurity.
 - Based on advocates' estimates, Illinoisans could experience a statewide loss of over \$100 million in federally-funded SNAP benefits in the year 2020. A significant portion of this would be in Cook County.
 - Because SNAP dollars are spent in our local businesses, they have a "multiplier effect" of around 1.5 - meaning that the total loss to the Illinois economy could be closer \$150 million.
- This policy change will exacerbate long-standing racial disparities in income, wealth, and negative health outcomes that unfairly disadvantage Black and Latinx Cook County residents.

Rather than enact counterproductive and punitive policies, we have urged the federal administration to collaborate with workforce development system leaders and local stakeholders to strengthen the SNAP Employment and Training program and other critical public investments in job training and workforce development.

We urge all members of the Board of Commissioners to support this resolution, and in so doing, take a stand in support of SNAP participants in Cook County. Many of our neighbors rely on SNAP to supplement their food budgets in an economy that continues to exclude and marginalize many people. We support this resolution and look forward to working with the Board and its many constituents, including on-the-ground service providers, systems leaders, and other advocates to minimize the harm associated with this dangerous policy.

Sincerely,

Mari Castaldi
Director of Policy and Advocacy
Chicago Jobs Council