

Los Angeles area residents speak out against food stamp cuts

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The recent \$11 billion cut to the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is already having a devastating impact on the working class. Workers in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, like those in every other urban area of the United States, are heavily dependent on Food Stamp subsidies to meet their basic nutritional needs.

Out of 10 million residents in the greater Los Angeles area, more than 1 million depend on the benefits. On a national level, the figure is even higher, proportionally speaking, with one out of every seven individuals dependent on the program. This difference is largely due to significant bureaucratic obstacles California residents experience in attempting to receive the benefit.

Los Angeles recipients receive an average of \$151 per month or \$1,812 per year in food stamp assistance. By contrast, the US Department of Agriculture estimates the absolute minimum recommended amount to be spent on food each month to meet basic nutritional needs (monthly Thrift Plan) to be \$181.30 for a 19 to 50 year old male and \$161 for a 19 to 50 year old female. In other words, the existing average food stamp assistance—before the cuts—does not even meet basic needs. Moreover, these meager benefits often must be stretched to feed dependent children and other family members as well.

As a result of the rising cost of fresh produce and other healthy and nutritious foods, food stamp recipients are already reduced to buying cheaper second-rate processed foods. This situation only promises to worsen with federal cuts to the program implemented last Friday.

The cuts amount to \$11 billion over the next three years, or \$36 per recipient per month. As part of

negotiations over the 2013 Farm Bill, additional cuts are expected. The figure of \$11 billion is roughly equivalent to five days' worth of US military spending, or only half a percent of the combined wealth of the 400 richest Americans. The cuts also amount to only 13 percent of what the Federal Reserve pumps into the US stock market each month through its quantitative easing program.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers in the Los Angeles Area about the social impact of the cuts.

Alejandra works as a housekeeper in the Los Angeles area. Though she does not currently receive benefits through the SNAP program, her mother, who is also a housekeeper, does.

“Yes, I have heard of the cuts to the food stamp program and I think they're very terrible. As it is already, the assistance my mother gets through the program isn't enough to survive on. I don't remember how much she gets exactly but it's between \$150 and \$170 each month. This isn't enough to feed her and my sisters who live with her, and she has to provide the rest herself by working.

“I actually heard about the cuts actually because my mom called me when they happened and she was extremely worried about it. I had to try and calm her down and convince her that everything was going to be okay. It breaks my heart because this is not someone who's gaming the system. She works hard for every penny she has, and sometimes I feel like she's being punished even though she's doing all the right things.

When asked about the political implications of the cuts, Alejandra said, “Well I don't know all of the facts about why they decided to make these cuts to the food stamp program. I do know that it does always seem like they make poor and working people suffer and the rich don't have to lose anything. It just isn't fair.”

Frankie Olague lives in the Pasadena area of Los Angeles.

“I don’t work or currently receive food stamps myself, however my father recently suffered a major stroke and I have to be a full time caretaker for him. He has little feeling or movement in the left side of his body. Most of the time his left arm doesn’t work at all. He’s receiving workers compensation now which is very little.

“As far as the cuts to food stamp cuts go, I think you’re right that the government serves the wealthy and cuts from the working class. It’s not just the actual cuts either. Prices are going way up, and the wages and benefits people get just aren’t keeping up with the prices. So, food stamps benefits are already small to begin with. They aren’t matching the rise in prices and now they’re actually being cut too.

“Just to give an example of what I’m talking about, I’m a boxing fan, and the figure I heard was that [welterweight boxer] Floyd Mayweather Jr.’s \$40 million prize winnings are basically equivalent to the \$2 million Muhammad Ali made in his day. Workers making \$30,000 per year have similar increases in prices but obviously their pay hasn’t gone up nearly as much as those guys.

“This is really why hard-working people need these food stamps, because they simply can’t afford to eat without them. Without these benefits people are just going to starve. I have friends and family who also get food from food banks, and it really doesn’t seem like that even comes close to making up the difference.

“I also don’t buy this argument that people use food stamps as a crutch to not have to work. Like you said, you can’t expect people to work in conditions of mass unemployment. When the economic crisis happened, people who had been working hard for 20 or 30 years all of a sudden found themselves jobless. What are we supposed to do, just let them starve and rot?”

Albie works as an executive recruiter in the Los Angeles area.

“I think it’s really unfortunate that we had to cut a program like that which so many people rely on. There’s always an argument about what can be cut versus what should be cut. There are so many people living in my community who are taking advantage of this program who don’t deserve to have these cuts made to them.

“I would say there are definite misplaced priorities at the federal level in terms of what they decide to cut. Look at the large benefits and tax credits that certain large businesses get while people on food stamps have to suffer. It isn’t just the adults who receive the benefits it’s also little kids who can’t eat, don’t do well in school and all that entails.

When Albie was asked what he thought about cuts to food stamps while \$85 billion was being pumped into the financial markets every month, he said, “The argument is always that these big banks and institutions are just too big to fail and it’s only the most vulnerable who have to make sacrifices. That really has to stop.”



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