

New Yorkers condemn food stamp cuts

A WSWS reporting team
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President Obama signed a bill last Friday that reduces food stamps, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), by \$8.7 billion, affecting 850,000 poor families.

Obama signed these cuts in food benefits into law only two weeks after he claimed to decry the growth of economic inequality in the US in his State of the Union address. The bill was signed only one day after Washington legislators voted down an extension of long-term unemployment benefits, which had expired on December 28 of last year.

It is estimated that the new law will reduce food stamp allotments by an average of \$90 a month, or \$1,180 a year. This follows the \$5 billion in cuts that were enacted in November of last year, which reduced benefits by about \$30 to \$50 a month.

In New York City, 1.8 million people depend on food stamps. This total includes many who are low-wage or minimum-wage workers, and half of this number are children. In a population of 8.3 million, more than 21 percent need food stamps to survive.

Even before the food stamp cuts in November, three fourths of all New Yorkers receiving food stamps had to visit food pantries and soup kitchens. In a recent letter to the *New York Times*, Margarete Purvis, president of Food Bank for New York City, reported that 85 percent of all the facilities in her organization's network have experienced increased lines for food assistance since the cuts were made in November.

A number of workers who were leaving the New York Common Pantry, located in the east Harlem section of Manhattan, spoke to WSWS reporters about the latest cuts.

Mariam Diallo told the WSWS: "I don't want them to cut food stamps. I am a single mother with five children. They took some money from us last November. I used to work four days a week as a caretaker for old people, but my hours have gone down

and I only make \$7.50 an hour. Now I only work three days a week for the agency and then for only four hours a day.

"Every day, I ask the agency for more hours and better pay, but they tell me that they don't have any more jobs, hours or higher wages. This is why I go to the braiding shop to work another day.

"The bill they passed to cut food stamps is good for the rich, not for us. These cuts are no good if they are cutting \$100 a month. I don't know why they have to cut food stamps again when they just cut them for the first time in November.

"My sister is having her food stamps cut as well. She is sick and can't work, and they are cutting her, too. I know a lot of people who are upset. This is no good. The people need food stamps to eat."

Jazmine Dejesus said, "The last round of food stamp cuts in November reduced my benefits from \$180 to \$140. This new round of budget cuts will reduce my food stamp allotment from \$140 to \$40. I am going to have a heart attack. It is the poor that will suffer the most.

"My husband and I both work. He is a construction laborer who only gets a minimum wage and makes \$250 a week. I am a dog-walker and also make \$250 a week. We have a child to support.

"My husband and I are both vegetarians, which means that our food is more expensive. It costs money to eat healthy. I get food stamps and still have to come to a pantry.

"Obama isn't for the people. A lot of people voted for him because they figured that a black man would be for all the working people. In reality, he serves the elite. America is a corporation, not a country. It is about the rich getting richer and the poor staying poor."

The WSWS spoke with a clerk in New York City's Department of Social Services, part of the Human Resources Administration (HRA), which administers

the food stamp program and other social benefits. She did not want to be named for fear of retribution at her job. She began working for the HRA four years ago. Despite being a city employee, she relies on food stamps and pantries to help make ends meet. She spoke about her experience on the job administering social services.

“People come in and ask why their food stamps are being cut. I don’t have an answer for that. As it is, you can’t feed a family on what the government is giving.

“We get a lot more applications now. So much gets denied. If your case is infracted for any reason, even if it’s a computer error, you have to start all over in the system.

“They make it extremely difficult for anyone who wants to fight back. They make you go to State Court.

“It’s a way to keep people in the system down to a minimum. It’s all because of the economy. I have people coming in from all walks of life. One lady a couple years ago lost her job making \$150,000 a year. She has two master’s degrees, highly educated. When she came in all I could say was wow.”

Ivette Rodriguez explained the impact of food stamp cuts. “We’re going to be in trouble. The value of a dollar is going down. You rarely see a dollar store anymore, and if you do, nothing there is a dollar. You go in with 15 bucks and come out with three things. I have to go to food pantries to make my money last. It’s difficult for the working class and for people on a fixed income. It’s not like we have assets like rich people. We’re just trying to live day by day.”



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