

Thousands of Iowans to lose Medicaid and SNAP benefits as lawmakers pass bill restricting access to public assistance

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A mere month after the Biden administration slashed food stamps for workers nationwide, the Iowa House approved a bill last Thursday that imposes more stringent eligibility criteria for those receiving food assistance benefits and mandates regular checks on all public assistance recipients.

Senate File 494, passed by a vote of 58-41, ensures that hundreds to thousands of the poor will be denied access to vital programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), Medicaid, the Family Investment Program (FIP) and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The state Senate passed the Republican-backed bill in March and it now heads to Governor Kim Reynolds' desk for her signature. The legislation stipulates that by July 1, 2025, the state administration must revamp its existing system and establish a new computerized eligibility program to check income, assets and identity. Agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services and Iowa Workforce Development must gather new information on registrants to ascertain their eligibility.

Agencies will also conduct an asset test on all members of the applicant's household to determine eligibility for SNAP benefits.

Households with over \$15,000 in liquid assets or cash on hand are not eligible for SNAP. This means households with savings, cash or other easily accessible funds above this threshold would be ineligible to receive SNAP benefits. Thus, workers will be forced to decide to save for their child's education or food. In fact, a 2016 report by the Urban Institute discovered that states implementing asset tests deterred recipients

from maintaining bank accounts or saving for emergencies.

Moreover, the bill requires agencies to draw on information from federal, state and other sources before deciding on initial or continued eligibility for public assistance applicants or recipients.

The legislation also mandates applicants to undergo a computerized identity authentication process involving a knowledge-based questionnaire composed of financial and personal questions.

The Iowa Hunger Coalition, an anti-hunger association, commented on the computerized identity process, "While this may have the potential to increase access for some people (those with transportation or medical barriers, or without access to the required forms of identification), it also presents a significant access barrier to many people, especially those without internet access, limited credit history or limited English proficiency. This requirement would go against USDA regulations for SNAP. Were this new computerized identity authentication process an option, not a requirement, it would have the potential to increase access for SNAP applicants and would be in-line with USDA regulations."

The legislation further stipulates that Medicaid recipients in Iowa must collaborate with child support services as a prerequisite for obtaining benefits through the program. Those who refuse will be kicked off or denied the benefit.

According to the Legislative Services Agency, in fiscal year 2022 an estimated monthly average of 287,000 Iowans relied on SNAP benefits. Throughout

the state, Iowans collectively received a monthly sum of \$60.4 million in SNAP benefits during this period, with the federal government bearing the total cost. Additionally, Iowa and the federal government shared the costs of administering the SNAP program, with the Iowa government contributing \$2.2 million toward the administration of SNAP.

In January, Iowa House Republicans drafted House File 3, a bill that seeks to impose draconian limitations on the items purchasable by those enrolled in SNAP. The bill proposes basing SNAP-eligible purchases on the approved food list for the WIC program, which is extremely limited and nutritionally outdated.

The approved WIC grocery list includes select cereals, whole grain bread, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, canned and dried beans, peanut butter, canned tuna, salmon, 100 percent fruit juice and certain dairy products. Many everyday foods, such as fresh meats, canned vegetables and fruit, milk, eggs, tofu, frozen prepared food and deli cheese, would not be allowed.

Led by Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley, 39 Iowa Republicans have co-sponsored this reactionary legislation. The proposed bill limits what SNAP recipients can buy, targets other public assistance programs, such as Medicaid, and lowers the income level for Iowans to qualify for SNAP benefits. A House subcommittee is currently considering the bill.

Commenting on the proposal at the time, the WSWs wrote that SNAP is “a prime target for cutbacks by the ruling class of both big business parties. These cuts, along with other changes to the federal free and reduced cost school lunch program, will spell increased hunger and malnutrition, placing the health and lives of millions of people at risk, particularly older Americans and children. It is a recipe for obesity, diabetes and ill health, as families seek to round out their diets with cheap food.”

The tightening of eligibility requirements will place immense pressure on hundreds, if not thousands, of Iowans, already grappling with the consequences of the Biden administration’s decision to reduce SNAP benefits. With the termination at the beginning of March of the emergency food stamp benefit increase implemented in the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 42 million Americans, including many Iowans, have experienced cuts in their food stamps

ranging from \$95 to \$235 monthly per household.

The restricting and slashing of social programs by Democrats and Republicans show that this is a bipartisan issue. The American government works diligently, scrutinizing social programs with a magnifying glass to ensure a worker doesn’t receive a few extra dollars—in the name of saving taxes and encouraging “self-reliance”—while millionaires and billionaires are left to plunder and profit freely.

The absurdity of the situation can be seen in Iowa’s sole billionaire, Harry Stine, the founder of Stine Seed Company, one of the largest independent seed companies in the United States. According to Forbes, Stine has an estimated net worth of \$7.4 billion. He could fund Iowa’s SNAP benefits for years while remaining a billionaire!

In the face of stark inequality, workers must navigate a stringent checklist to secure food for themselves and their children. At the same time, billions of dollars are channeled toward financing the war in Ukraine, recklessly hastening the march toward World War III. If the working class controlled this immense wealth, guided by a socialist leadership, hunger and poverty could be effectively eliminated. This striking disparity lays bare the grim reality of life under capitalism: seemingly limitless resources for war while workers and the poor are left to contend with mere scraps.



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