

The human cost to children of Trump's cuts to food stamps and Medicaid

Phyllis Steele
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On July 4, 2025, President Trump signed into law the “One Big Beautiful Bill”—a sweeping legislative package providing massive tax breaks for the wealthy and deep reductions in critical safety-net programs, particularly Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, food stamps). The bill slashes \$930 billion from Medicaid and another \$285 billion from SNAP over the next decade.

This legislation marks the greatest redistribution of wealth from the working class to the rich in US history. It makes permanent \$3.8 trillion in tax cuts, overwhelmingly benefiting corporations and the super-rich, while gutting Medicaid and food assistance. In addition, it allocates \$150 billion to the military, including the Golden Dome missile shield and another \$200 billion for expanding immigrant detention camps and adding 10,000 new Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and 3,000 Border Patrol officers. This is a direct transfer of wealth from society's most vulnerable to the oligarchy and its repressive apparatus—yielding a net gain of \$2.4 trillion for the ultra-wealthy.

Medicaid and SNAP are not merely line items on a federal ledger; they are hard-won lifelines rooted in social struggles. Both programs emerged from the Great Society initiatives of the 1960s. Medicaid was established under the Social Security Amendments of 1965 as a federal-state health insurance program for low-income families, building upon earlier patchwork efforts like the Kerr-Mills program. SNAP has its origins in a 1939 Depression era pilot, before being formally codified in 1964 through the Food Stamp Act, under President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

The new legislation undoes these historic gains. Medicaid now faces the largest rollback in its history. The effects will be devastating. Those already struggling with paperwork—forms often requiring the expertise of a caseworker—will be disenrolled due to clerical errors. As in the past, lawmakers are relying on administrative red tape to push millions off the rolls. This bureaucratic cruelty is already visible in states like Texas.

According to Dr. Rachel Pearson in the *New York Times*, she has removed up to 1.7 million children from Medicaid since 2023, not due to ineligibility, but on the basis of procedural errors. She recounts how a child with epilepsy was denied medication due to a coverage lapse, resulting in an emergency room visit. Texas has shown how paperwork can be weaponized to deny care—and this model will become national.

Children will not only get sicker, they will die. Delays in re-enrollment and loss of preventive care will result in a surge of avoidable hospitalizations and deaths. The cuts threaten to leave 11–17 million people uninsured and cause up to 50,000 preventable deaths annually, according to a *Commonwealth Fund* model.

The impact on public schools will be catastrophic. Medicaid is the fourth-largest source of federal education funding, providing \$7.5 billion annually for school-based health services. Schools receive \$4–6 billion in Medicaid reimbursements every year to pay for school nurses, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, and mental health counselors. In states like Texas and Rhode Island, reimbursements range from \$28 to \$467 per student annually.

American Association of School Administrators (AASA) surveys show that 86 percent of school districts use Medicaid to fund school health staff. If these funds are slashed, 80 percent anticipate layoffs, 70 percent expect cuts to mental and behavioral health services, and 62 percent foresee reductions in disability support. For rural and underserved districts, where schools are often the only source of healthcare, the effects will be even more dire.

According to the Georgetown Center for Children and Families, the Medicaid “unwinding” process that began in 2023 could lead to 2–6 million children losing coverage. The bill's new parental work requirements could raise that number to as high as 8 million by the mid-2020s. The compounded effects will reduce Medicaid reimbursements by 25–50 percent, costing some districts tens of millions of dollars annually and threatening the jobs of healthcare

personnel critical to student well-being.

The mental health consequences are equally severe. The Association of California School Administrators found that 70 percent of school districts would reduce mental health services if Medicaid were cut, jeopardizing suicide prevention and trauma support services. The result will be higher rates of absenteeism, untreated depression and preventable deaths among children.

SNAP cuts follow a similarly ruthless logic. The bill imposes new work mandates up to age 64, including some parents. It also includes semi-annual reviews and forces states to cover 5–15 percent of benefit costs by 2028. These changes are expected to push 3–4 million people off SNAP, worsening hunger and straining already overburdened local food banks.

In Michigan, for example, Governor Gretchen Whitmer warned that nearly 300,000 residents—many of them children—could lose SNAP. Already, schools are implementing cruel verification systems, such as requiring K–8 students to wear IDs to receive meals. One Detroit educator described how children without IDs face disciplinary action or are charged fees. “For many of them, these two meals are the only ones they get each day.”

Up to 16 million students may lose automatic free-meal access. For the working class, this means more hungry children, exhausted educators and overwhelmed school systems, which are already barely treading water.

SNAP-related cuts also have an economic ripple effect. A joint analysis by the Commonwealth Fund and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates the combined Medicaid and SNAP cuts could cost up to 1 million jobs by 2026, especially in education, healthcare and food services, while draining billions from state and local budgets.

The consequences are already being felt. The “One Big Beautiful Bill” includes the elimination of SNAP-Ed, a \$400 million program that funded nutrition education, food access, and community partnerships across all 50 states. The University of Minnesota Extension, which ran the acclaimed SuperShelf program in 80 locations, announced it would lay off 59 educators. Similar layoffs are planned at Utah State, the University of Illinois, and the University of California. Nationwide, up to 2,000 educators may lose their jobs in post-secondary education as a result.

These layoffs mean the destruction of community gardens, cooking classes and food distribution programs that sustain the working poor. In Illinois, 25,000 pounds of venison were distributed to food pantries through SNAP-Ed. These cuts are severing the last threads of connection between the lifelines of universities to communities in desperate need.

According to nokidhungry.org, a child going to school hungry is more than a distraction. It can seriously undermine

a child’s ability to learn and grow. A pre-pandemic survey found that nearly 60 percent of students in low-income communities arrived at school hungry, and of those, 12 percent were too preoccupied by hunger to complete their evening homework.

Teachers see the implications daily. Eighty percent report that hunger impairs concentration, 76 percent notice that academic performance suffers, 62 percent observe more behavioral issues, and 47 percent report increased illness among students. Beyond the classroom, persistent food insecurity, where children lack essential nutrients, such as iron early in life, can stall cognitive development—harming memory, mood and motor skills and even altering brain structure.

The ripple effects extend into social-emotional development and long-term wellness. Hungry children often struggle to manage energy and focus, which can diminish their ability to build friendships, follow instructions and control impulses. These early deficits can set a trajectory in which children begin kindergarten behind their peers—with weaker vocabulary, social skills and self-regulation—and may never fully catch up. Chronic hunger also triggers stress and anxiety, compounding its negative impact on mental health and learning capacity. School meal programs, therefore, are not just a stopgap. They are crucial interventions.

The child poverty rate in America is now at 13.7 percent. This staggering increase from 2021, when 5.2 percent of children were living in poverty, is partly due to the expiration of the enhanced Child Tax Credit, which was implemented in July of 2021.

The “One Big Beautiful Bill” is a calculated assault on public health, education and the very notion of a democratic society. Behind each of these numbers lies a child denied medication, a school without a nurse, a family without food.

This counterrevolutionary bill, measured in suffering and enforced with calculated cruelty, will not be tolerated by the working class. A socialist society that feeds children with the earth’s abundance and educates them will not emerge from the largess of the powers that be. It must be fought for by the working class. This means joining the Educators Rank-and-File Committee.



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