

“Work or starve”: Trump’s SNAP cuts drive millions from food stamp rolls

Kate Randall
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The passage of Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” (OBBBA) last July 4 marked the most sweeping assault on food assistance in American history. The law, which slashed \$187 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, through 2034, is now in full effect—and its human toll is staggering.

At least 3.5 million people lost food stamp access in the months between the bill’s enactment and February 2026, with millions more expected to follow as the additional provisions took effect beginning in June. In practice, the law’s expanded work requirements reduce to a single command: work or starve. This is not a policy adjustment but the deliberate starvation of workers and their families, carried out to finance tax cuts for the wealthy and a trillion-dollar military machine.

The ruling class has not been equivocal about its intentions. The *Wall Street Journal*, which functions as the ideological mouthpiece of the financial oligarchy, has championed the cuts as a long-overdue correction to a program it portrays as a driver of “dependency.” The paper has praised work requirements as a spur to self-sufficiency, dismissed hunger data as “politicized,” and treated the rolling back of food assistance as long-overdue fiscal virtue.

A new regime of work requirements

At the core of the OBBBA’s attack on SNAP is a radical expansion of work requirements. Effective March 1, 2026, Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) aged 18 to 64 are required to document at least 80 hours per month of work, education or community service to maintain eligibility. Failure to meet these requirements for three months out of any 36-month period means a complete loss of benefits.

The new law dramatically extends the reach of these requirements in two critical ways. Previously, the upper age threshold for ABAWDs was 54; the OBBBA raised it to 64, forcing workers approaching retirement age—many of them physically worn down by decades of labor—to justify receiving food stamps. At the same time, the definition of a “dependent child” that exempts a parent from work requirements was tightened from under 18 years to under 14, stripping protections from parents of teenagers who are now deemed non-dependent for purposes of federal food policy.

Among the groups stripped of previously held exemptions: veterans, individuals experiencing homelessness, parents whose youngest child is 14 or older, and people who were in foster care at age 18. Refugees, asylees and trafficking survivors who have long been eligible for SNAP—including T Visa holders—have lost eligibility altogether. Meanwhile, area waivers that previously shielded recipients in weak labor markets have been gutted. Under the new rules, waivers apply only in areas where unemployment exceeds 10 percent—a threshold last reached during the depths of the Great Recession. Most struggling communities no

longer qualify.

To comply, a recipient must document paid employment, volunteer work, job training, education or workfare—activities that must be tracked and submitted to state agencies every month. Federal funding for SNAP administration has been slashed in half, however, incentivizing states to reduce staff and narrow access to aid.

Analysts estimated at the time of the bill’s passage that 2.4 million Americans, including families with children, would lose SNAP benefits—a figure from the Congressional Budget Office that is already being eclipsed. A May 2026 analysis found that at least 3.5 million had already lost access, with states bracing for further losses as June enforcement deadlines arrive.

The law targets the most vulnerable: the working poor, whose household of four must earn no more than \$31,000 a year to qualify; older adults between 55 and 64 who face the greatest barriers to sustained employment; the long-term unemployed; people living with chronic illness or disability who may not meet the narrow formal definitions of exemption; and immigrants with legal status who have now been declared ineligible. In California alone, the state’s Legislative Analyst’s Office calculated that 660,000 recipients of CalFresh—the state’s version of SNAP—will fail to meet the new requirements. Nationally, one senior public health official with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation warned: “As more parts of the bill take effect, it’s likely another million people could either lose benefits or see them drastically reduced.”

The average SNAP benefit amounts to roughly \$6 a day—or \$2 per meal. This is what the financial oligarchy has decided is too generous to maintain.

The hunger crisis they tried to hide

Even as the cuts took effect, the Trump administration moved to suppress the data that would document their consequences. In September 2025, the USDA announced it was terminating its annual Household Food Security Report—the government’s primary tool for measuring hunger in the United States, produced under both Republican and Democratic administrations for more than three decades. The department called the report “redundant, costly, politicized and extraneous,” and said it did “nothing more than fear monger.”

Eric Mitchell, president of the Alliance to End Hunger, warned that the cancellation sent a signal that “tracking and battling hunger is no longer a priority.” His conclusion: “Hunger will not disappear simply because it is no longer tracked.”

The last figures the USDA released before killing the reports told the story the administration wanted buried. In 2024, according to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), 47.9 million Americans lived in food-

insecure households—unable to reliably access an affordable, nutritious diet. That figure represents 1 in 7 households nationwide. The rate of food insecurity rose to 13.7 percent, with 14.1 million children living in food-insecure homes—a slight increase from 13.8 million the year before. Food insecurity struck 24.4 percent of black households and 20.2 percent of Latino households—more than double the 10.1 percent rate for white, non-Latino households. Single-parent households headed by women experienced food insecurity at a rate of 36.8 percent, more than one household in three.

These numbers represent a crisis that has been worsening for years—from 10.2 percent of households in 2021 to 13.5 percent in 2023—and these are the pre-Trump figures. The OBBBA’s assault on SNAP has only just begun to register in data that, in any case, the government is now refusing to collect.

As SNAP is gutted, food banks across the country are being overwhelmed. Demand at food pantries has risen dramatically, with food bank directors describing operations as being in “disaster response mode,” drawing down reserve funds that are explicitly described as unsustainable. The same period that has seen SNAP gutted has also seen the federal government slash hundreds of millions of dollars in annual food bank assistance—simultaneously attacking both the primary program and the last-resort fallback.

For every one meal a food bank provides, SNAP provides nine. The WIC program for pregnant women and young children—itsself facing cuts—is on average far smaller than SNAP. The charitable safety net is being assigned an impossible task, while the working poor are quietly being told that their hunger is a personal failing.

Answering the *Wall Street Journal*

The reactionary press has been fulsome in its support for the assault on food assistance. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial published June 7 was headlined, “The Food Stamp Rolls Decline—Hurray: GOP reforms are paying off as more recipients work or volunteer.” It endorsed the OBBBA’s SNAP provisions, argued that the program had become “an income transfer for able-bodied adults who choose not to work,” and that work requirements were nothing more than a restoration of “the basic bargain that Americans have always accepted: that government aid should come with responsibilities.” This framing—forced work as civic virtue, hunger as personal choice—revives the moral logic of the Victorian workhouse.

The claim that work requirements promote employment is not supported by evidence. The SNAP population already skews heavily toward the employed, the elderly, the disabled and caregivers—people who cannot simply conjure 80 hours of qualifying activity on demand. The majority of adult SNAP recipients who are not elderly or disabled are already working; the rest face serious barriers, from chronic illness to caregiving responsibilities to a labor market that offers insufficient hours, unpredictable schedules and poverty wages. The requirement does not create jobs. It creates bureaucratic hurdles that knock people off the rolls.

The claim that SNAP creates “dependency” reveals the class perspective of its authors. The median SNAP benefit—roughly \$6 a day—is not a lifestyle. It is a subsistence supplement for workers whose wages have been systematically suppressed for decades by the same financial oligarchy whose editorial mouthpiece now lectures the hungry about self-reliance. The average qualifying family of four earns no more than \$31,000 a year. They are dependent on SNAP because capitalism has made it impossible to survive on the wages capitalism pays (for those able to find employment).

The termination of the USDA’s hunger tracking report makes the “fear mongering” charge particularly cynical. The government is cutting food to tens of millions, eliminating the data that documents it and then accusing those who protest of exaggerating.

What a socialist strategy requires

The fight against hunger cannot be separated from the fight against the capitalist system that produced this crisis. The same contradictions that drive the ruling class to wage war abroad—against Iran, in Ukraine, in Gaza—drive it to impoverish workers at home. Trump has said so openly: in April he declared that the government should stop worrying about “Medicaid, Medicare, all these individual things” and focus on “one thing, military protection.” Asked about the impact of the Iran war on the cost of living, he replied: “I don’t think about Americans’ financial situation. Not even a little bit.” The hundreds of billions spent bombing Iran, financing the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and funding the ICE police-state machine must be extracted from the working class—through wage cuts, inflation and the gutting of programs like SNAP.

The same crisis is driving workers into struggle. The past months have seen a powerful growth of the class struggle: rank-and-file rebellions at auto parts plants, strikes by meatpacking workers, nurses and teachers, mass rejections of union-backed contracts. Workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan voted by 86 percent to strike against a UAW-backed agreement; over 90 percent of workers at Dana Corp. plants across three states rejected union-negotiated contracts. This is the objective basis for a fight—but it requires a program and an organization that the existing union bureaucracies will not and cannot provide.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school and neighborhood, independent of the union apparatus and both corporate parties, the Democrats and Republicans. Linked through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), these committees must fight for immediate demands: the unconditional restoration and expansion of SNAP and WIC as social rights, not means-tested charity; a sharp increase in Medicaid and Medicare against all cuts; automatic indexing of wages, pensions and benefits to the cost of living; and an end to price-gouging by the energy and food monopolies whose profits are soaring while workers line up at food banks.

But these demands raise the necessity for a direct assault on the wealth and power of the capitalist oligarchy. The giant energy corporations, food monopolies, banks and financial institutions must be transformed into publicly owned utilities, democratically controlled by the working class. The fortunes of the billionaires—amassed through war, speculation, exploitation and price-gouging—must be expropriated and used to meet urgent social needs. The fight to end hunger is inseparable from the fight to end the war, and both require breaking the grip of the financial oligarchy over economic life.

Access to food is a basic social right, not a privilege to be earned through documented labor submitted monthly to a government agency. Securing it requires the independent mobilization of the working class against both capitalist parties—for workers’ power and the socialist reorganization of economic life to serve human need, not private profit.



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