Millions purged from US food stamp rolls, as Wall Street demands more cuts

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The budget reconciliation law signed by President Donald Trump on July 4, 2025—H.R. 1, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” (OBBBA)—has produced the largest reduction in the history of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), otherwise known as food stamps. By slashing $187 billion from the program over 10 years, a cut of roughly 20 percent, the legislation has fundamentally reshaped what remains of the American social safety net.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) puts the decline at roughly 5 million people, or 12 percent, since the law’s enactment. According to US Department of Agriculture figures, 36.6 million people are now receiving benefits, down 5.7 million from May 2025, below the pre-pandemic level and the lowest number enrolled in 17 years.

Children have borne the heaviest share of the cuts. In the 25 states that report data on children, 1.2 million have been cut off since July 2025. Refugees, people granted asylum, survivors of trafficking and domestic violence—all lawfully in the US—have been stripped of eligibility outright. Undocumented immigrants have never been eligible.

This is a deliberate, bipartisan policy of the ruling elite. While hundreds of billions are appropriated for war, this policy attacks nutrition, promotes hunger and disease, and takes food out of the mouths of workers and their families. The average benefit in fiscal 2025 was $187.94 a month per person, or about $6.26 a day. Even this paltry sum is considered excessive by the financial oligarchy.

The ruling class has been explicit about what it wants. Under the headline “The Food Stamp Reform Is Working,” the *Wall Street Journal* celebrated the SNAP cutbacks in an editorial Wednesday, writing, “As always, the political left is spinning these declines as a human tragedy. Not so. Republicans have merely ended the literal free lunch for able-bodied beneficiaries and states.” The editorial concluded, “Washington’s welfare buffet is fiscally unsustainable and promotes dependency.”

The main mechanism of the cuts is stringent new work rules for recipients. The Congressional Budget Office had estimated that these work requirements could remove 2.4 million people from SNAP in a typical month, but by May enrollment was already about as low as it had been forecast to go in 2030. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins called the results “a pretty big win” for those wielding the ax to the program.

The machinery of removal from SNAP

Under the work requirements spelled out in the OBBBA, so-called able-bodied adults without dependents aged 18 to 64 must document at least 80 hours a month of work, job training or community service or lose benefits after three months in any 36-month period. The law raised the age ceiling for complying with the work rules to 64 from the previous 54, forcing workers approaching retirement to prove their eligibility to receive the pittance in monthly food assistance.

At the same time, veterans, people experiencing homelessness and youth aging out of foster care were stripped of exemptions from the work requirements. The definition of a dependent child was narrowed from under 18 years to under 14, so that a parent caring for a 15-year-old is now subject to the work rules. Additionally, the waiver for areas of high unemployment now applies only where official statewide unemployment exceeds 10 percent, a threshold no state meets.

The removals from the SNAP rolls have been overwhelmingly bureaucratic. While the paperwork burden for recipients and the states has exploded, federal funding for SNAP administration has been cut in half. What results, Auburn University public health historian Zachary Schulz told *Newsweek*, is “a form of attrition driven by paperwork, missed notices, or difficulty completing interviews.”

As a result of the assault on benefits, participation in SNAP has fallen in every state but Alaska, and by 10 percent or more in 23 of them. The biggest drop has been in Arizona, where enrollment fell 54 percent between July 2025 and May 2026, with nearly 473,000 people cut off from benefits, about 180,000 of them children.

For the first time, more Arizonans now visit food banks each month than receive food stamps. “We think of ourselves as the canary in the coal mine,” Natalie Jayroe, CEO of the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, told NPR. “We are showing the rest of the country a really scary scenario.”

The attack on food stamps is having a ripple effect on school nutrition programs. Children in SNAP households are automatically certified for free school meals, and schools qualify for universal free breakfast and lunch when at least a quarter of their students take part in programs like SNAP. So as the rolls shrink, whole schools lose eligibility. Miami-Dade County Public Schools, where more than 500 schools had qualified for universal free meals, has ended them at most of those schools. Losing free school meals costs a family roughly $1,000 per student a year.

Hunger, disease and a bill sent to the states

Food banks cannot replace what is lost through food stamp cuts. SNAP provides nine meals for every one supplied by the emergency food system, and federal food bank aid has itself been slashed. Erin McAleer, president of Project Bread in Massachusetts, said, “The scale of this is bigger than the food pantries and food banks can meet.”

Under the OBBBA changes, the states’ share of administrative costs will rise from 50 percent to 75 percent in fiscal 2027; beginning in October 2027 they must pay between 5 and 15 percent of benefit costs for the first time in the nutrition program’s history.

SNAP participants already spend roughly $1,400 less a year on healthcare than comparable nonparticipants. Reducing a family’s food budget has a direct impact on health and well-being, with food insecurity associated with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, birth defects and mental illness.

As hunger has grown, the government has responded by destroying the means of tracking it. The US Department of Agriculture announced in September 2025 that it would stop producing the Household Food Security Report, the country’s primary instrument for measuring hunger for more than three decades, calling it “redundant, costly, politicized, and extraneous.” The last figures available showed 47.9 million Americans, including 14.1 million children, in food-insecure homes in 2024.

Over decades, the Democrats have denounced the cuts in words and ratified them in votes, laying the groundwork for the present assault. The three-month limit on food stamps for able-bodied adults without dependents was created by the 1996 welfare reform bill signed by Bill Clinton. In June 2023, Joe Biden signed the debt-ceiling deal raising the age for SNAP work requirements from 49 to 54, with 165 House Democrats and 44 Senate Democrats voting yes. Trump’s 2025 law then extended it to 64.

In negotiations on the farm bill, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said on July 20 he would oppose any farm bill without “more time for states and counties to prepare to shoulder the cost of SNAP.” Not one Democrat, however, has demanded that a single person removed from the rolls be restored to them. The continuing resolution the House approved Tuesday by 370 votes to 48 to keep the government running until December 11 does nothing to change the work requirements, the age 64 ceiling, the immigrant exclusions or the cost shift to the states, which are all permanent law under the OBBBA. The great majority of Democrats voted for it.

The opening of a larger offensive against the working class

On August 24, the *Washington Post*’s editorial board declared that “there’s no realistic path to solvency for the U.S. government without changes to the retirement state,” proposing that Social Security be reduced to “a tax-funded transfer payment as a floor, with means-tested benefits and compulsory private savings above that.”

The Social Security trustees reported June 9 that the retirement trust fund will be exhausted in late 2032, after which benefits would fall 22 percent absent congressional action. House Speaker Mike Johnson said June 8 that Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security have “to be adjusted and fixed,” adding, “We have a plan to do that next year”—after the November elections.

Democratic Representative Tom Suozzi of New York introduced a bill with Republican Tom Cole creating a Social Security commission modeled on the 1983 commission that raised the retirement age to 67 and taxed benefits. Democratic Senators Chris Coons, Jeanne Shaheen, Tim Kaine and Mark Warner cosponsored a bill creating a fiscal commission to recommend further cuts.

All of this comes as the House funds the Pentagon at $839 billion a year and the administration seeks $87.6 billion more, most of it for the Iran war. Global bond yields stand at their highest since 2008, while the markets demand that governments pay for war by cutting what remains of social programs.

The Democrats’ criticism of the food stamp cuts is confined solely to its timetable, and their criticism of the coming assault on Social Security and Medicare will be confined to the same. To fight the assault on programs and benefits the working class has wrested from the ruling elite in struggle, the working class must break free from the political straitjacket of the pro-capitalist, big-business parties and fight for a workers’ government based on a socialist program.