

**Pennsylvania Should Plan to Protect as Many ABAWDs as Possible from SNAP Program Cuts in 2016**

In 2016, Pennsylvania’s statewide waiver from the SNAP program’s rules regarding able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) will expire. These extremely harsh rules limit ABAWDs to only 3 months of SNAP benefits every 36 months – even if they are looking for work and cannot find a job. There are exceptions for people who live in an area with very high unemployment (areas subject to a “geographic waiver”), or who are exempt from work rules, or who are working or in a qualifying work program for 20 hours per week. To protect as many ABAWDs as possible, Pennsylvania should create a comprehensive plan including the following elements;

1. **Maximize use of geographic waivers**. The Center on Budget & Policy Priorities has sophisticated tools to help states maximize the areas of the state qualifying for geographic waivers. Pennsylvania should accept CBPP’s help in identifying areas to be waived.
2. **Maximize exemptions from work requirements.**
	1. Provide multiple ways to verify “unfitness” for work, including:
		1. DHS’s PA 1663 disability form. With Medicaid expansion, many people who previously completed this form to get Medical Assistance will no longer need it for MA eligibility, making it harder for DHS to identify this population.
		2. DHS should create a separate, simpler form for just the ABAWD exemption, and allow a wide range of medical providers – including mental health therapists – to complete it.
		3. Federal regulations allow caseworkers to make their own determinations where unfitness is obvious. Ensure that caseworkers know they can do this.
	2. Maximize existing SNAP exemptions and train workers to recognize them, including:
		1. People applying for or receiving Unemployment Compensation;
		2. Individuals who have experienced domestic violence;
		3. People in drug or alcohol treatment programs;
		4. People who are caring for an ill or incapacitated household member;
		5. Homeless people;
		6. People expecting to return to work within 60 days;
		7. People enrolled in school or training at least half time; and
		8. Women who are pregnant.
3. **Offer work or training slots to everyone who needs one to keep SNAP.**
	1. Take the pledge to offer a training slot to everyone who needs one, allowing PA to draw down additional federal funds.
	2. Work with WIOA agencies to target this population.
	3. Promote and provide community service as an option (requiring only enough hours of service to work off the SNAP grant at minimum wage).
	4. Offer paid work experience.
4. **Use all available 15% exemptions**. Federal law allows states to exempt 15% of ABAWDs subject to the rule, per month. FNS authorizes a fixed number of months of SNAP eligibility per year for states to distribute to ABAWDs as they choose. PA should use all of them.