Policy Matters Ohio

STATEMENT

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Federal changes could strip some Ohioans' food assistance by the end of the month

"Big Beautiful Bill" policies will especially harm seniors

Last week, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) began informing some Ohioans that they could lose access to food assistance as soon as May 31st. Seniors will be disproportionately affected: In Cuyahoga County, 675 of the 1,350 people who will lose SNAP benefits are over 55. (Only Cuyahoga County data were available at the time of publication. Policy Matters has requested statewide data.)

ODJFS sent "discontinuation notices" to people who have not reported enough work hours to meet the expanded work requirements imposed by H.R. 1, the Trump administration's "Big Beautiful Bill." Among that bill's vocal defenders is Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who takes the stage at the City Club of Cleveland tomorrow. Policy Matters Ohio Executive Director Hannah Halbert issued the following statement:

"Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has made food a priority in his public statements, but as he takes the stage at the City Club of Cleveland, the administration he represents is making it harder for Ohioans to put meals on the table. Ohioans should look beyond rhetoric and consider how federal policy decisions are affecting basic needs like food access.

"Recent SNAP termination notices underscore what's at stake. H.R. 1 imposed work requirements on all states. This change included expanding the existing work requirements on Ohioans who are "Able Bodied" Adults (ABA), cutting off food assistance unless they complete, document, and report at least 20 hours per week of work activity. H.R. 1 required Ohio to eliminate or sharply restrict certain existing state exemptions from the requirement.

"These federal changes include requiring Ohioans over the age of 54 to work, or qualify for poorly reasoned, narrow exemptions with criteria that may be difficult to prove. That includes seniors ages 60-64, unless they are pregnant, living with another person under the age of 14 who is qualified for assistance, or an 'Indian, Urban Indian, or California Indian.'

"People who are caring for a child between the ages of 14 and 18 are no longer exempt from work requirements and will lose access to food assistance if they fail to show they

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have met them or fall within a narrow exemption. The same is true for veterans, former foster youth, people who are homeless, and others.

"SNAP participation in Ohio dropped by more than 80,000 people, nearly 6% (3 million, 8%, nationwide) between the H.R. 1's July 2025 enactment and January 2026, the latest month of data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). According to data from the Ohio Department of Aging, found in their "Elder Rights" Data tool, in 2025, 13% of people over 60 years of age in Cuyahoga County participated in SNAP. Statewide, that rate is nearly 10%. Seniors living in Appalachian Ohio counties have the largest need. Ross County has rates exceeding 22%.

"The rigid eligibility rules and the process to establish compliance do not account for the realities older adults face. Many in this age group contend with health challenges, access to healthcare to document their fitness for work, support to navigate the certification process, and barriers to employment.

"Administration officials and their allies to try to pit Ohioans against their neighbors by repeating anecdotes of fraud or abuse — but the data is starting to show that cuts are poorly targeted. For older Ohioans living on fixed incomes, SNAP is a lifeline. Losing access to this support threatens their health and stability while shifting additional strain onto local food banks and community resources.

"If federal leaders are serious about strengthening communities, policies should make it easier, not harder, for older Americans to afford necessities."