

Families Can't Eat Promises: Congress Must End the Shutdown and Protect SNAP

By Jennifer Brillhart, MPA, CFRE, and Stuart I. Haniff, MHA

At food banks across Pennsylvania, we see parents skip meals so their children can eat, seniors stretching cans of soup for the week, and grocery clerks now relying on the same donations they once sorted. These are the Pennsylvanians the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) was built to protect—and right now, that protection is at risk for nearly 2 million people if Congress fails to pass a federal budget.

On Oct. 20, [CBS News](#) confirmed that Pennsylvania has halted all November SNAP payments due to the ongoing government shutdown — putting roughly \$366 million in monthly food assistance at risk. For families already struggling with higher grocery prices, rising rents, and other impossible choices, that's not a statistic — IT IS an emergency! When SNAP stalls, parents start rationing, children's nutrition suffers, and local grocery stores lose steady customers almost overnight.

Food banks are already straining to fill the gaps, but we alone cannot replace what federal nutrition programs provide. For every one meal a food bank offers, SNAP provides nine.

The situation is being compounded by an ongoing state budget stalemate, of more than 114 days, which is holding up funding for social service organizations across the state. The impasse in Harrisburg is making it even more difficult for our food banks to purchase food at a time of great need.

The charitable food system is doing everything possible, but it was never designed to carry this burden alone.

This crisis didn't come out of nowhere. The [federal budget law signed by President Donald Trump earlier this year](#) includes deep, long-term cuts to SNAP and other safety-net programs, which means less federal help to put food on the table even as prices rise.

For residents of Pennsylvania, this situation results in increased costs and reduced assistance for securing food, a concern heightened by the uncertainty surrounding SNAP benefits now for nearly 2 million individuals during the current shutdown.

The Commonwealth's [Department of Human Services](#) has warned it cannot backfill these costs, urging lawmakers to “reopen the government and protect vulnerable Pennsylvanians.” SNAP doesn't just fight hunger—it sustains the broader economy. Every dollar in benefits generates as much as \$1.50 in local spending, supporting farmers, truckers, and small businesses alike.

Agriculture is one of Pennsylvania's most important industries, and when benefits disappear, those cuts ripple through the entire food chain—from producers to processors to grocery clerks.

With tens of thousands of federal employees now furloughed or without pay, the strain on food banks grows by the day.

Here in York County, where about one in nine residents rely on SNAP, the impact is immediate and devastating. The York County Food Bank serves over 40,000 individuals each month, including children, seniors, and working families whose wages haven't kept pace with inflation. We've already lost \$1 million in annual food shipments due to federal budget cuts, and now we're bracing for a surge in need as SNAP benefits disappear.

Across Pennsylvania, [more than 2 million people rely on SNAP every day — including nearly 770,000 children.](#)

Every day, we see how hard Pennsylvanians work just to get by—and how fragile that balance is when essential and basic services grind to a halt.

Ending the shutdown isn't about politics—it's about responsibility, dignity, and whether families can count on the most basic form of security: knowing they'll have food tomorrow. Food is not a bargaining chip, and hunger should never be a weapon in a policy fight.

We have the resources to end hunger. What we lack and need is the will to act. Congress must reopen the government, restore SNAP, and protect the people who make this Commonwealth strong.

If you or someone you know is struggling to get adequate food, dial 211. To donate or volunteer to provide help during these difficult times, visit the [York County Food Bank](#) to sign up for a volunteer shift or find the food pantry nearest you.

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