

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Food stamp cuts will hurt hungry Hoosiers

As you look down the line of people waiting to get into our local food pantries, you find a multitude of different stories, social backgrounds and education levels, but what is common among many of them is fear. Working families, veterans, seniors, children are all wondering if they will have enough food for the week or month. Hunger is crushing our neighbors. Its not a problem found just in one part of the city or in a specific social class. Hunger lives next door.

The sad truth is this situation will get worse as of Nov. 1. On that day, enhanced federal benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, more commonly known as SNAP, will expire. SNAP benefits were increased in 2009 after the Great Recession hit and many people lost their jobs.

We estimate that our city will lose 11 million meals per year as of Nov. 1. More than 40 million meals will be lost across the state.

Unemployment has remained high, and therefore SNAP expenditures have as well, but this is causing politicians to call for cuts, turning SNAP into a political minefield. The hungry in our city are not the images that are commonly portrayed. The hungry are the working poor, children, veterans and seniors who are trying to make ends meet every day but face difficult choices between paying bills or buying groceries to feed their families.

The numbers are clear. In 2012, there was a need for more than 200 million additional meals in Indianapolis. That need has not diminished.

To fill the gap from this looming federal cut, all of our local charities would have to immediately double their output. This, of course, is not possible. The House of Representatives recently passed additional cuts. If those cuts become law, every private charity would need to triple the food assistance they provide to make up for the meals lost.

Controversy around SNAP usually draws on two common myths about the program. The first is that SNAP creates dependency and encourages able-bodied people not to work. In fact, most folks who need SNAP promptly get back on their feet. Average time on the program is less than nine months. Second, most SNAP recipients are already working, but they have jobs that leave them unable to make ends meet.

It is also a myth that our local charities can fill the gap from cuts to SNAP funding. SNAP contributed 74 percent of all food assistance in 2012, and even with it, we were still not reaching all the people struggling to put food on the table.

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Dave Miner