

conversations

Congress shouldn't listen to myths about food stamps

The best decisions are based on facts. In the midst of the debate in Congress about cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP (food stamps), there are some prevalent myths we need to address.

Myth 1: SNAP creates dependency.

This simply isn't true. The average amount of time someone is on the SNAP program is just nine months.

People fall into poverty when they lose jobs, and when they begin to get back on their feet they no longer qualify for SNAP. You have to be desperately poor both in terms of income and assets to qualify. There are not many abusers of the program because screening is rigorous.

Myth 2: SNAP is growing uncontrollably. This also isn't true. In its 50-year history SNAP has repeatedly gone up and down as need has waxed and waned. As the economy improves SNAP will go down again. Forty-seven percent of those receiving food are children. Cutting funding for SNAP takes food from children.

Myth 3: Individuals alone should take care of the poor. The Indy Hunger Network has taken a close look at how to ensure everyone has enough food.

The truth is we need everyone — individuals and institutions, public and private, faith-based and secular, notfor-profit and businesses — to end hunger.

Myth 4: Local charities can fill any gap created by cutting SNAP. Our local charities together contribute 9 percent of food for the hungry, while SNAP contributes 67 percent of meals served. Our wonderful local charities are already working flat-out. Even now we fall short.

All of the food assistance programs merit and need our full support.

David J Miner

Board chair emeritus, Bread for the World Indianapolis