



## Failure to Amend SNAP Eligibility Requirements Hurts #RealCollege Students

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“[The] [substantial federal investment in higher education is at risk](#) if college students drop out because they cannot afford basic necessities like food.” These are the words from the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) in a report to Senator Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member on the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in December 2018. The GAO report went on to explicitly recommend that the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) clarify the student rules to improve the ability of eligible students to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), thereby complementing federal investments in higher education.

Yet on Friday April 10, [FNS declined requests from 29 states and the District of Columbia](#) to waive certain eligibility requirements in SNAP to better support college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. FNS’ decision amplifies [Congressional failures to address #RealCollege students’ basic needs](#) in the COVID-19 stimulus legislation to date. The significant gaps in relief efforts, coupled with FNS’s latest actions, threaten not only the well-being of individual students but it undermines federal investments in higher education. The United States government spends over \$120 billion annually on federal student aid programs and recently invested [\\$14 billion more via the CARES Act](#) to stabilize higher education in response to COVID-19. The lack of recognition that SNAP is a critical support for students is a short-sighted response that will negatively impact our current workforce pipeline and economic recovery.

The U.S. GAO report documented widespread food insecurity among college students and noted that the SNAP work requirements and complex eligibility requirements made it difficult for students to access the program. SNAP has specific rules that determine [which students can receive food assistance](#) yet many of these eligibility requirements are tied to work.

The Hope Center has extensively documented the willingness of food-insecure college students to work—in fact, prior to the pandemic we released [results of a survey](#) showing that 70% were already employed. Another 15% were actively seeking work but were unable to find it. The pandemic has made the situation far worse, as many students lost their on and off-campus jobs and the country faces [record unemployment](#).

It is counterproductive to deny students access to food supports. Food insecurity can cause a host of [negative health consequences](#) that [impede a student’s ability to attend and complete college](#). SNAP and other public benefits can increase students’ financial stability and [improve their likelihood of completing degrees or certificates](#).

Congress must act to halt the federal requirements tied to work in public benefit programs for all low-income individuals, including college students. Now is the time to invest in community health, stabilize families, and help them get back on their feet to repair this economy.