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*Includes Pre-Spray Traffic Area  
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# Advocates for the hungry decry proposal

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

due announced the new directives last month, describing them as “closing a loophole,” but the new rules would disrupt Oregon and 42 other states’ streamline of the process for their citizens to receive food benefits.

The rule change would see 66,000 of the some 600,000 Oregonians on SNAP benefits lose their coverage—or 34,990 households— Jennifer Greutz, Oregon Department of Human Services spokesperson, told the Portland Observer.

Jeff Kleen, public policy advocate for the Oregon Food Bank, said the agency is “very concerned” over the new rule.

“We had heard rumors that this proposed rule could come, particularly because this has become kind of routine for this administration to propose these administrative rules when it doesn’t get the provisions and bills that it wants from Congress,” Kleen said.

The technical name for the rule targeted is “broad based categorical eligibility,” Kleen explained.

Currently, recipients of temporary welfare assistance can earn up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level for their household and still qualify for food stamps, a higher level than the typical 130 percent federal poverty level cut off for food stamps alone.



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Jeff Kleen, public policy advocate for Oregon Food Bank, expects negative impacts on hunger and food insecurity for thousands of people in Oregon should a Trump Administration policy go through that would restrict the number of people eligible for food stamps nationwide.

In either case, the amount of earnings would not be sufficient to a livable wage for most Oregonians, Kleen said.

For instance, 185 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of four is \$47,638, according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. However \$96,047 per year is the estimated wage a family of two adults and

two children would need to make to afford a modest two bedroom apartment, childcare, and other costs in the Portland metro area, according to the family budget calculator of Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank addressing the needs of low- and middle-income workers in economic policy discussions.

The policy as it stands now allows families to pay for unexpected monthly costs without going hungry or missing their bills, Kleen said.

“It basically prevents families from going without food, falling into debt when unexpected costs come up. And that cost could be the car repair that someone needs to get to their job, get their kids to school, or get a medical appointment,” he said.

Another potential ripple effect of the new policy is that some families—an estimated 265,000 nationwide—may also lose free school meals for their children, Kleen said.

“They’d have to go through, again another process, to see if they would qualify for reduced price meals. But now if you have two or three kids and suddenly you’re facing 50 to 75 cents a meal, that adds up over a week for breakfast and lunch. And so that would be an additional loss on top of losing SNAP benefits.”

What’s more, Kleen said that the demand Oregon Food Bank faces would likely increase should the policy change go through.

“For every one meal that the nationwide food bank network provides, SNAP provides 12. So the scale at which SNAP provides food assistance compared to us is 12 fold.”

Kleen added that the Oregon

Department of Human Services reported that every county across the state is likely to be impacted, with big, urban counties being initially hit the hardest, should the rule change become finalized.

Though the USDA estimates a net savings of about \$9.4 billion to taxpayers over five years, research referenced in the federal agency’s own report indicated that for every dollar of SNAP benefits that is spent, it was offset by creating \$1.79 of new economic activity. Officials also conceded that the cuts will impact food security for some people and reduce the savings rates among those individuals.

The change would mean a loss of \$3 million of federal benefits in Oregon each month—or \$36 million over a year, Kleen said.

Oregon Food Bank and Hunger Free Oregon, another nutrition advocacy group in Portland, have been overseeing an effort to generate as many public comments against the new rules, hopefully 100,000 or more, which Kleen said “will at the very least slow down the USDA,” adding that by law, the agency must review and analyze each of the comments.

“Hopefully they will see the error of their ways and decide not to issue a final rule. Or we potentially give Congress time to take action and prevent it from going into place or being implemented.”

The public can make comments on the proposed rule change at regulations.gov from now until Sept. 23. The policy proposal is called “Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” and has already generated over 13,000 comments.



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