



Greater Chicago Food Depository
Statement on Cook County Losing ABAWD Waiver
Nov. 21, 2019

We are very concerned that Cook County will not be eligible for a waiver from the onerous work requirement for people considered to be able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs). There's no question that this will mean the loss of food assistance for some of our most vulnerable neighbors in Chicago and throughout Cook County.

Many recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits who are considered able-bodied still may not be able to work the 80 hours a month required by the program for a host of reasons, including undiagnosed health conditions, recent incarceration, discriminatory hiring practices and lack of transportation.

While on the surface it may seem that "able-bodied" adults face low barriers to employment, particularly during periods of low unemployment, in fact many of these people face hurdles that make it difficult to obtain jobs or work the requisite number of hours.

Some of those barriers – for example, mental illness – qualify individuals for an exemption from SNAP work requirements. But other barriers – such as former incarceration – do not qualify for exemptions but nevertheless pose steep, sometimes insurmountable, hurdles to employment. Furthermore, hours are often inconsistent for low-wage work, making a time threshold difficult to meet.

Simply put, taking away their food assistance isn't going to help them find work.

A good paying job – for those who are able to work – is the best solution to hunger and poverty. But connecting individuals with stable employment requires more than just an availability of jobs. It requires an investment in job training, vigilance against discriminatory hiring practices, and access to transportation, among other measures.

Through Chicago's Community Kitchens, the Food Depository provides workforce training to individuals struggling to find employment. Through our network of 700 agency partners, we provide food assistance to anyone in need, regardless of employment status.

In the weeks and months to come, we will work diligently with the state and partner organizations to respond to what likely will be an increased need for food assistance in our communities.

To learn more about how you can get involved with the Food Depository's advocacy efforts, visit chicagosfoodbank.org/advocacy