

Barham Recommends Stocking Food Banks: SNAP Benefit Cuts Will Hit Region Hard

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
February 11 2020 3:03 PM



**Supplemental
Nutrition
Assistance
Program**





ALTON - Many in the Alton region will be influenced by the recent federal government decision to strip some residents of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Attorney General Kwame Raoul joined a multistate coalition of attorneys general in a lawsuit to fight the federal government's attempt to halt some residents of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, commonly called "food stamps." There are many in the Riverbend area that depends on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Abe Lee Barham, a community activist and precinct committee person for the First Ward in Alton, said his reaction to the cuts of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is that it is "a tragedy."

“Sometimes students go to school hungry,” he said. “I am glad our attorney general filed this lawsuit and I hope something can be done.”

State Rep. Monica Bristow said this is a federal matter, but her office has been getting a lot of calls about the SNAP benefits reductions. She said she was glad to see the attorney general’s action.

“We have been getting quite a few calls on it,” Bristow said. “It is a federal matter, but we hope our attorney general can help us. There are definitely people who need help.

“We know there is a tremendous need in this area. These people need a hand up, not a handout. Some lose their jobs or have unexpected expenditures because of medical issues and rely on this money for food.”

Raoul and the coalition joined a lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia opposing a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rule that would limit states’ ability to extend SNAP benefits beyond a three-month period for certain adults. Raoul and the coalition argue that the rule directly undermines Congress’ intent for SNAP and that the USDA violated the federal rulemaking process. Additionally, Raoul and the coalition argue that the rule would impose significant regulatory burdens on states and harm states’ residents and economies, and are urging the court to declare the rule unlawful and issue an injunction to prevent the rule from going into effect.

“The USDA’s arbitrary rule punishes people who live in poverty and disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable residents and communities of color,” Raoul said. “I am committed to fighting to protect SNAP and critical programs that support the work states are doing to help our residents escape the cycle of poverty.”

Congress altered SNAP in 1996 to introduce a three-month time limit on SNAP benefits for unemployed adults between the ages of 18 and 49 who are not disabled or raising children – “able-bodied adults without dependents” (ABAWDs). However, states have the ability to request waivers for that time limit if the state or part of the state has an unemployment rate above 10 percent or does not have a sufficient number of jobs to provide employment for SNAP recipients who would otherwise lose their benefits. The USDA’s “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents” rule, which is slated to take effect April 1, 2020, would severely restrict states’ ability to request such waivers.

Barham is going to focus some of his attention on area food banks. He said he knows the food banks are going to be critical for some of the residents to have meals for their families in the coming days if the SNAP cuts continue.

“I wish there was some way we could meet with local grocers and see if they would leave their leftovers at the food banks,” Barham said. “We need to come together as a community to offset these cuts. If you take a look at the food banks at how long the lines are, you know there are problems and this will make it much worse.”