

# **Durbin, Duckworth Statement On Omnibus Provision Protecting Food Access For 8,000 Illinois Supportive Living Facility Residents**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today issued the following statements after they successfully secured a provision in the fiscal year 2021 Omnibus Appropriations Bill that will stop the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) from terminating Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for a group of supportive living facilities (SLFs) in Illinois that serve 8,000 low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities. Without this provision from Durbin and Duckworth, USDA was set to kick these 8,000 individuals in Illinois off of the SNAP program in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to a rigid and arbitrary new regulatory interpretation by USDA, and despite the Supportive Living Program serving vulnerable Illinoisans for decades with federal approval.

“The cruelty and senselessness of the Trump Administration’s USDA reached new lows with their attempt to eliminate SNAP benefits, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, for 8,000 seniors and individuals with disabilities across Illinois. The Illinois Supportive Living Program has served our state well for more than two decades as an essential lifeline for those in need of a helping hand. I am pleased to have secured this provision, together with Senator Duckworth, to block this bureaucratic overreach and protect access to nutrition benefits for our neighbors,” Durbin said.

“This provision’s inclusion is welcome news for thousands of low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities in Illinois who were at risk of losing access to nutritious meals in the middle of a deadly global pandemic,” Duckworth said. “I’m proud to have worked alongside Senator Durbin to prevent the Trump Administration from implementing their harmful effort that would have jeopardized effective community-based services and allowed vulnerable Illinoisans to go hungry this holiday season.”

There are SLFs in every Illinois Congressional District and in 71 Illinois counties. A complete list of SLFs in Illinois is available [here](#).

In November, Durbin, Duckworth, and a bipartisan group of Illinois Delegation members sent a [letter](#) to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue opposing the Department’s administrative overreach, and criticized the Department’s efforts to terminate these SNAP benefits despite legislative action and prior commitments in Congressional testimony from USDA to preserve SNAP benefits for this group, and twenty years of USDA approval for this arrangement that helps keep low-income seniors out of more institutional nursing home settings.

Illinois’s SLF program was created in 1997 through a state law designed to be an alternative to institutional nursing settings for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities under Medicaid. For more than twenty years, the Illinois’s SLF program has been a nationally leading model in promoting affordable, independent-living options, and has relied upon a federal Medicaid waiver to serve this population.

USDA has threatened to end the SNAP program for these Illinois SLFs despite no findings of fraud or misuse of SNAP benefits, and despite the fact that Illinois SLFs comprise a fraction of one percent of the SNAP program yet importantly serve a very low-income and vulnerable population. For decades, USDA consistently authorized new SLFs and re-authorized existing SLFs across Illinois as SNAP participants, enabling the facilities to serve meals in an innovative and efficient manner by pooling SNAP benefits for meals for eligible low-income disabled and elderly residents who otherwise would face physical difficulty with conventional individual grocery purchases using SNAP.