



# Durbin Questions Secretary Vilsack At Agriculture Committee Hearing

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today participated in a Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee hearing titled: “Opportunities and Challenges Facing Farmers, Families, and Rural Communities.” During the hearing, Durbin highlighted the importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for feeding low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities who are served by the Supporting Living Facility program in Illinois. This program has helped thousands of vulnerable Illinoisans live independently for more than two decades, but USDA has recently tried to block these eligible residents from accessing SNAP benefits. To address the health and hunger needs of these seniors in Illinois, Durbin has helped lead legislative efforts since 2018 to protect this program. Durbin asked U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack to end the Department’s hostility toward this program and help reach a solution.

**“For nearly 25 years, Illinois has had a model where we have SNAP benefits available to these seniors, and they pool them in 150 senior living facilities around the state each day for lunch. But just a few years ago, they said ‘not okay anymore.’ ... there’s no fraud and abuse. It’s just the use of these SNAP benefits in a pooled situation to pay for their ... On behalf of the 8,000 seniors, I appeal to you. Can you fix this for us?”** Durbin asked Secretary Vilsack.

Secretary Vilsack noted that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is working on a pilot program to address the issue and examine other ways USDA could be more flexible for beneficiaries.

**“Senator, we are trying to work with the state to develop the framework of a pilot that would allow this problem to go away so you wouldn’t have to deal with it each and every year in the appropriations process. I would also say that I think it’s an invitation for us to look at ways in which the SNAP program can be more accessible and more meaningful. I think we have to be significantly flexible as we deal with an aging population in many of these states. So we are committed to working with the state of Illinois to try to figure out how to establish the pilot,”** Secretary Vilsack responded.

Video of Durbin’s remarks is available [here](#).

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