

AN ASSEMBLY CONCURRENT RESOLUTION urging the Department of Human Services to take certain actions to sustain or increase access to food assistance benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program during the coronavirus disease 2019 outbreak.

WHEREAS, The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, provides critical assistance to supplement the food budget of low-income families nationwide; and

WHEREAS, SNAP is regulated at the federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) pursuant to the “Food and Nutrition Act of 2009,” Pub.L.110-246 (7 U.S.C. s.2011 et seq.), and administered at the State level by the Division of Family Development, within the Department of Human Services, in conjunction with the county welfare agencies; and

WHEREAS, In December 2019, over 671,000 New Jersey residents relied on SNAP food assistance to supplement their family food budget; and

WHEREAS, As of March 13, 2020, New Jersey health officials had confirmed 29 cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in 10 counties; and

WHEREAS, In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Governor Murphy issued a State of Emergency and Public Health Emergency on March 9, 2020, authorizing all executive branch departments to utilize State resources to help communities and individuals respond to, and recover from, COVID-19 infection; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 226 New Jersey school districts have closed in response to COVID-19, depriving thousands of food-insecure students of access to the nutritious meals they usually receive at school; and

WHEREAS, Because many New Jersey colleges and universities have closed in response to the outbreak, many food-insecure students have lost access to their financial aid, which often covers the cost of an on-campus meal plan; and

WHEREAS, As New Jersey businesses temporarily close, stop operation, or require employees to work remotely in order to stem the spread of COVID-19, many minimum-wage employees may face job loss, reduced work hours, and potential income loss; and

WHEREAS, The USDA is authorized, during a public health emergency, to grant state waivers from certain SNAP requirements, such as allowing states to streamline program administration, extend beneficiary certification periods, and permit online benefits enrollment; and

WHEREAS, The New Jersey Department of Human Services requested a waiver from the USDA on March 11, 2020, that would allow the State to issue a supplemental SNAP payment equal to a half-month of benefits to allow recipients to stock up on a two-week supply of food to allow them to stay in their homes and help prevent the spread of COVID-19; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey (the Senate concurring):

1. The Legislature strongly urges the Department of Human Services to apply for any available federal waivers, pursuant to the Governor's declaration of a State of Emergency and Public Health Emergency, or any Presidential disaster declaration, to facilitate beneficiary access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and to ease any administrative barriers to accessing SNAP benefits.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly or the Secretary of the Senate to Governor Murphy, the Commissioner of Human Services, and the Director of the Division of Family Development.

STATEMENT

This concurrent resolution strongly urges the Department of Human Services (DHS) to apply for any federal waivers available to increase and extend access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and ease any administrative barriers to accessing benefits that arise from the nationwide outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Many New Jersey school districts, colleges and universities, and businesses have closed their facilities, encouraging students and employees to study and work remotely, as part of the State's effort to stem the spread of COVID-19. As a result, many hourly-wage earners are experiencing a sudden reduction in their weekly income, affecting their ability to purchase a sufficient quantity of nutritious food for their families. For some of these individuals, the amount of their monthly SNAP benefit, which is based on the family's income, may be insufficient as they experience a reduction in their employment hours. Additionally, with many schools, colleges and universities closing in an effort to stem the spread of COVID-19, food-insecure students are losing access to the nutritious meals they usually receive at school.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which administers SNAP, has multiple tools at its disposal to help states address food insecurity during a public health emergency, such as the COVID-19 outbreak. The USDA is authorized to grant state waivers from certain SNAP program requirements, allowing states to streamline program administration, extend beneficiary certification periods, and permit online benefits enrollment. Although the DHS has already applied for one such waiver, which would allow a supplemental SNAP payment equal to one half-month of benefits to allow beneficiaries to purchase a two-week supply of food to allow

them to stay in their home and help prevent the spread of COVID-19, it is the sponsor's intent to urge the DHS to apply for any additional waivers as may be available, in order to provide expedited food assistance benefits to the New Jersey families whose incomes are reduced during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Urges DHS to apply for federal waivers to facilitate and increase access to SNAP benefits during coronavirus disease 2019 outbreak.