



ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE, INSPIRED BY CATHOLIC SISTERS

NETWORK Urges Passage of the RESTORE Act in the 2023 Farm Bill

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice strongly supports the inclusion of the provisions of H.R. 3479 and S. 1753, the RESTORE Act, in the 2023 Farm Bill. This bill would repeal the lifetime SNAP benefits ban for returning citizens from prison.

Our Values

NETWORK, as a faith-based advocacy organization seeking to advance policies to promote racial and economic justice, believes passing the RESTORE Act is critical to advancing economic and health security for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Our strong support flows from a recognition that all people have dignity as children of God. Catholic Social Justice instructs us to uphold each person's dignity, which means ensuring that each person has what they need to live well. At minimum, this entails access to food, the most basic of our human needs.

Our current system of mass incarceration and racialized law enforcement focuses on punishment rather than rehabilitation and true community well-being. As a result, people experiencing poverty and people of color and their families are disproportionately harmed. The U.S. Catholic Bishops, in the pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, write, "No one may claim the name of Christian and be comfortable in the face of hunger, homelessness, insecurity, and injustice found in this country and the world." Our faith calls us to work for the end of hunger among the most vulnerable to allow human flourishing.

In the belief that the leadership and members of the Agriculture Committee share these most fundamental commitments with NETWORK and the larger faith community, **we urge the Committee to end the lifetime ban on persons convicted of a drug felony from participating in SNAP and to adopt the RESTORE Act's provisions in the Farm Bill.**

Repealing the Ban Promotes Justice, Safety, and Healthy Communities

Repeal of the lifetime SNAP benefits ban is an act of simple morality. Feeding the hungry is central to our call as people of faith. By repealing the current cruel and unjustifiable ban, Congress will honor SNAP's most basic purpose: to prevent hunger in our nation. Upon re-entry into the community, formerly incarcerated individuals already have paid their debt to society. But a lifelong ban on SNAP benefits imposes hunger and food insecurity as an inexplicable and perpetual form of punishment that bears no relationship to the individual's original offense.

Lifting the SNAP ban increases a returning individual's chance for successful re-entry into the community. We know that formerly incarcerated individuals face formidable obstacles in their re-entry to the community. Most leave incarceration with little or no personal assets, and they face a labor market that treats persons with prior arrests



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harshly. It is no surprise that, as a result, most returning individuals experience profound economic challenges that include food insecurity after their release from incarceration. Without resources to meet their most basic human needs post-incarceration, released persons will experience suffering and turmoil that can doom any hope of successful re-entry. Many states have opted out of this federal policy since it was enacted in 1996; however, 21 states still have the ban in place with full or modified conditions, which creates higher barriers to accessing SNAP benefits and limits the number of people who receive them.

Lifting the ban helps families and children. For formerly incarcerated individuals with children and families, the risk of undue suffering is shared with their entire family. Under current law, families receive far fewer SNAP benefits when a parent is ineligible. Thus, they face a far higher risk of hunger, along with the cascade of health and educational harms that result when children live in poverty. Obviously, a lifelong deprivation of SNAP benefits for formerly incarcerated persons subverts the very purpose of SNAP — not just for those individuals, but also for their families and children.

Lifting the ban is a matter of justice. Under the existing ban, these penalties—and the obstacles that they impose to a formerly incarcerated individual’s ability to rise up from poverty—can continue for decades after that individual has completed their sentence. Such continuing punishment is antithetical to any notion of a fair and just criminal justice system. It is, as a matter of simple criminal justice, irrational.

Lifting the ban ensures greater public safety. Depriving food assistance to individuals and their families in no way promotes public safety or deters crime. To the contrary, the inability to afford food for oneself or one’s family only increases recidivism. Studies have demonstrated that returning individuals who receive SNAP and other public assistance have lower recidivism rates than those who are barred from participation in those programs. Furthermore, the current ban also prevents formerly incarcerated individuals from participating in SNAP’s Employment and Training Programs, depriving them of job and vocational training opportunities that, for many, are critical tools to prevent recidivism. For any policymaker serious about reducing crime rates in the U.S., support for the RESTORE Act’s inclusion in the Farm Bill is imperative.

Include the RESTORE Act in the 2023 Farm Bill

The current lifetime ban on SNAP participation for individuals convicted of drug crimes is morally wrong and counterproductive to achieving the common good.

NETWORK fully supports inclusion of the RESTORE Act’s provisions in this year’s Farm Bill to decisively correct this wrong. We urge members of the Agriculture Committee who care about preventing hunger and reducing recidivism and crime to join us with their support.