

NETWORK Human Needs Legislation Talking Points — Sept. 2023

Inclusion of the RESTORE Act in the 2023 Farm Bill

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

For NETWORK community only—not for public distribution

NETWORK Supports the Inclusion of the RESTORE Act in the 2023 Farm Bill

The RESTORE Act will finally end the lifetime ban on persons convicted of a drug felony from participating in SNAP.

Our support for the RESTORE Act flows from two of our **core faith commitments**:

- 1) **All people have dignity** as children of God, and our faith calls us to work for the end of hunger among the most vulnerable to allow human flourishing.
 - Catholic Social Justice instructs us to uphold the dignity of each person. Because dignity refers to what people deserve by virtue of their humanity, **upholding dignity means ensuring that each person has what they need to live well**. At minimum, this means access to food, the most fundamental of our human needs.
 - Jesus says in the Gospel, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...” (Matt 25:35-36).

- 2) **Justice and mercy** are central to our call to live the Gospel faithfully. Our current system of mass incarceration and racialized law enforcement disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities, focusing on punishment rather than rehabilitation. As a result, the system itself increases poverty, particularly for those with limited income and Black and Brown communities.
 - 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.”
 - The “option for the poor and vulnerable” in Catholic Social Teaching calls us to put the needs of the most vulnerable and impoverished first.

Repeal of the lifetime SNAP benefits ban is an act of simple morality.

- Repealing this cruel ban will honor SNAP’s most basic purpose: to prevent hunger in our nation.
- Formerly incarcerated individuals already have paid their debt to society.
- A lifelong ban on SNAP benefits imposes hunger and food insecurity as perpetual punishment that has no relationship with the individual’s original offense.
- 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.

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Lifting the ban helps a returning individual's chance for successful re-entry into the community.

- Returning individuals already face huge obstacles to their re-entry to the community.
- Most leave incarceration with little or no personal assets.
- Formerly incarcerated individuals face a labor market that treats people with prior arrests harshly.
- Without resources to surmount hunger and meet other basic needs, released persons will experience suffering and turmoil that can doom any hope of successful re-entry.

Lifting the ban benefits families and children.

- Returning individuals share the risk of undue suffering with their families and children.
- Families receive far fewer SNAP benefits when a parent is ineligible.
- These families face a far higher risk of hunger, along with the cascade of health and educational harms that result when children live in poverty.
- The lifetime ban subverts the very purpose of SNAP for families and children of returning individuals.

Lifting the ban is a matter of justice.

- The ban—and the obstacles that it imposes on a returning individual's ability to rise up from poverty—continues for decades after that individual has completed their sentence.
- The ban is antithetical to any notion of a fair and just criminal justice system.
- The “War on Drugs” and over-policing of communities in poverty and Black and Brown communities have created an unjust system of mass incarceration and sustained, intergenerational poverty.

Lifting the ban increases public safety.

- Providing food assistance to individuals and their families promotes public safety and deters crime.
- The inability to afford food for oneself or family increases recidivism.
 - Studies show that returning individuals who receive SNAP and other public assistance have lower recidivism rates than those who are barred from participation.
- Allowing returning individuals to participate in SNAP's Employment and Training Programs provides skills and job training opportunities that are critical tools to prevent recidivism.

The current lifetime ban on SNAP participation for individuals convicted of drug crimes is morally wrong and counterproductive to achieving the common good. We strongly urge that it be repealed.