



ECONOMIC POLICY INNOVATION CENTER

Strengthen Food Stamp Work Requirements to Promote Opportunity

13 million able-bodied adults received Food Stamp benefits on average between 2017 and 2019, yet **62% of these work-capable recipients did not work at all.**

Under current law, Food Stamp work requirements **only apply to fewer than 4 million** able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), **just 9% of Food Stamp recipients.**

Just 18% of ABAWDs age 18-49 worked at least 20 hours per week to meet the work requirement through employment.

The current Food Stamp work requirements are limited, weak, and are **currently waived completely or in parts of 34 states.**

Work Requirements Work

Work is an essential American value. It is a positive good for individuals, families, communities, and our nation.

Offering a hand up and not just a handout would ensure better **results for everyone:** recipients who are put on a path towards self-sufficiency, the truly needy for whom a safety net is safeguarded, and the taxpayers whose funds are used more efficiently and effectively.

When work requirements are enforced, the number of able-bodied adults on the welfare rolls fall, time on welfare is reduced, **people reenter the workforce, and incomes increase.**

There are about **2.3 million more job openings in America than unemployed** individuals and the unemployment rate is low. **Too many able-bodied adults being completely out of the workforce** is a major problem for the economy.

Work requirements are overwhelmingly popular: 79.5% of voters on a 2023 Wisconsin ballot referendum supported work requirements.

What Should Congress Do?

Congress should continue the important work of welfare reform to strengthen work requirements and promote opportunity.

- **Eliminate geographic waivers** of work requirements.
- **Implement work requirements for all work-capable adults**, including parents.
- **Expand the age applicability** of work requirements to include prime able-bodied working-age adults.
- **Expand the hours of effort** requirement from the current just 20 hours per week expectation.
- **Prevent a lifetime of dependency** by ensuring the safety net is temporary for work capable adults.

Read the full paper at: EPICforAmerica.org