

Cutback to SNAP program is cruel and short-sighted | READER COMMENTARY

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Horacio Orduna, right, co-owner of El Mercadito in Allentown, Pa. talks with customer Carlos Rojas about cuts to the SNAP program. File. (DONNA FISHER / THE MORNING CALL)

A new federal rule tightening eligibility requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is short-sighted at best and, at its worse, a cruel indictment of those in poverty ([“Feds to cut up to 15,000 in Baltimore from food stamps; Maryland, other states suing to halt change,”](#) Jan. 23). What’s worse is that when you consider the profile of those most likely to be impacted by this rule — able bodied adults ages 18 to 49 with no dependents — you realize “opportunity youth,” one of the

most vulnerable segments of our population, could face circumstances that will make it that much harder to survive in our city.

The U.S. Agriculture Secretary's submission that this new rule will help move people "from welfare to work" displays a failure to grasp the fact that those who will be adversely impacted have limited options for employment and a myriad of others barriers to financial stability with which to contend. This is especially true for youth ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor working.

Maryland participates in Youth REACH, an annual survey of youth who may be experiencing homelessness or housing instability. In the 2017 Youth REACH survey, 1,219 of the youth surveyed were under 25 and unstably housed or homeless; 714 (59%) of these youths were in Baltimore. Those surveyed disproportionately identified as LGBTQ (23% of those surveyed, compared to 7% of the general population), were predominantly African American (68%), and only 28% reported being enrolled in school.

Many of these young people are caught in a cycle of poverty, products of an education system that has historically experienced inequitable investment. They must frequently navigate a challenged social safety net. In addition to homelessness, they are also dealing with mental and physical health challenges. Cutting off access to food is unconscionable and will only make matters worse.

Furthermore, while the plan is projected to save the federal government \$5.5 billion, it will leave state and local municipalities and nonprofit organizations to fill in the gaps relying on what are already strained resources. It is our hope that a broad-based, bipartisan coalition of support — representative of both the private and public sector — will call for a halt to the implementation of this rule and that the courts, recognizing the measure does more harm than good, will block its implementation.

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