



## **Debt ceiling deal extends SNAP work requirement to older Kentucky workers**

Steve Bittenbender

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(The Center Square) – The bipartisan agreement to raise the debt ceiling that Congress passed earlier this month will have some implications for thousands of middle-aged Kentuckians who receive public assistance.

A provision in the legislation extends the work reporting requirement for more recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. Previously, those aged 18 to 49 needed to show proof of employment or participation in a job training program to maintain benefits. Starting later this year, beneficiaries between ages 50 and 52 must start abiding by the work reporting mandate. In October 2024, the requirement would extend to those aged 53 and 54.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, those requirements would remain in effect until 2030.

The Kentucky Center for Economic Policy estimates it would impact 13,000 residents. Policy Associate Jessica Klein said in her analysis that many of those individuals may lose their benefits.

“Older adults are more likely to face age-related discrimination or to have a work-limiting health condition that may restrict their ability to work, the types of jobs they can still do or their ability to get enough work hours,” Klein wrote.

She added the measure may hit Kentucky harder than other states, as a report from Feeding America found nearly 1-in-6 Kentuckians in their 50s have food security issues. That’s the second-highest rate in the U.S.

Aside from being waived during the COVID-19 pandemic, SNAP work reporting requirements have been in place for decades. However, there’s disagreement on how effective they are in promoting employment.

“That requirement is much more effective at tripping people up with unnecessary paperwork than increasing work participation,” Klein said.

In an April analysis, Chris Edwards, the Kilts Family Chair in Fiscal Studies at the Cato Institute, said that the SNAP work requirements represent a small portion of the savings Republicans sought in the debt ceiling bill.

However, he argued it was still a good idea.

“It is important to begin reining in bloated entitlements, and adjusting eligibility to encourage work is a good place to start,” he said.

While Klein was critical of the work requirement policy in general, she added that the agreement also included additional exceptions to the work reporting requirement, including ones for veterans, the homeless and people previously in foster care.

“While these exemptions are promising and could help prevent these populations from losing benefits, they are contingent on how the exemptions are administered by state and federal agencies,” Klein said.