



Increase Accessibility of Healthy Food

Support **HB 2689** to eliminate barriers to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for people with prior drug felony convictions

Since 1996, individuals convicted of certain drug felonies have been disqualified from receiving SNAP, which provides low-income individuals with financial assistance to purchase food. While 24 states across the country have eliminated this ban, benefits have only been partially restored in Arizona. Individuals should not continue to be punished after incarceration. It is time to fully eliminate barriers to food assistance for those trying to re-enter society and rebuild their lives.

- **Denying people with drug felony convictions access to SNAP can promote food insecurity** and negatively affect the health of the ex-offender, their family, and their community. A recent Harvard University study shows that drug offenders fully eligible for SNAP at the time of release are 13 percent less likely to return to prison in the year following release.* Assistance can be incredibly beneficial at a time when other economic prospects may not be readily available.
- **Current law requires** the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) to verify if an applicant is participating or has previously participated in a substance abuse treatment program, is on a waiting list for a program, or has been determined by a licensed provider to not need a program.
- **These restrictions to SNAP access are a burden on state resources and capacity, as well as a financial strain on formerly incarcerated individuals.** DES estimates processing 10,500 such applications, which requires time for review and evaluation. This wastes valuable time for workers who are already overwhelmed with demand due to COVID-19. For the individual to comply, they must take time away from work, a job search, or reunification with family.
- **Providing SNAP benefits costs the state nothing** because SNAP benefits are 100 percent federally funded. Allowing individuals with prior drug felony convictions to receive SNAP does not burden our state budget, and prohibiting people from receiving SNAP produces no state savings. Nutrition assistance dollars benefit local economies because they are redeemed in local grocery stores and other community businesses.
- **Nearly 1,500 individuals with prior drug felony convictions would have access to SNAP** if the ban were fully eliminated, according to DES estimates.

We urge you to support **HB 2689** (supplemental nutrition assistance program; eligibility) to help individuals gain valuable access to food assistance and rebuild their lives.

*Yang, Crystal S. "Does Public Assistance Reduce Recidivism?" *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 2017, 107(5): 551-555. doi.org/10.1257/aer.p20171001. ** Data provided by the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Benefits and Medical Eligibility, January 2021. Data are from 2018-2020 and do not reflect current inmates who may be eligible for SNAP upon release.