

Connecting SNAP and Workforce Pathways: A Practical Policy Update

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Introduction

Outdated rules in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are quietly undermining America's efforts to close its middle skills gap, and few policymakers realize how much is at stake. The current definition of "employment and training programs" excludes most credential and degree programs¹, meaning SNAP participants risk losing benefits before they can gain the skills employers actually need. To address this gap Congress should update the definition of employment and training programs to include credential and degree programs.

A Sense of Urgency

This change is especially urgent now, as new federal SNAP rules are projected to reduce monthly participation estimated 3.2 million people² a month, including almost a million parents. These expected losses make it even more critical that SNAP rules genuinely support upward mobility, rather than restrict it. Updating the definition is not only timely, it directly strengthens SNAP's ability to function as a workforce and economic mobility tool in the following ways:

- Strengthens access to programs that improve employability, better positioning participants to increase their earnings and improving their purchasing power, resulting in less use of SNAP.
- Aligns SNAP with Medicaid work requirements, which includes education participation.
- Creates clearer cross-program alignment for states, reducing administrative complexity and costs for states.

To achieve this change, Congress should amend section 6(d)(4)(B)(i)(V) of the Food and Nutrition Act³ by inserting "consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license



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This recommendation is directly informed by over a decade of experience working in states and witnessing how this policy creates confusion and makes it harder to engage people in education and training programs. This is also a timely change as states work to make SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) programs more robust in recognition that employers increasingly demand workers with education beyond high school.

For modern learners, whose pathways are nonlinear and shaped by the integration of work, education, and caregiving, access to supportive services is essential. Access to SNAP and SNAP E&T can provide improved stability by improving food security and supportive services that strengthen both credential attainment and work participation.

Conclusion

When programs align training with real labor market demand⁴, provide supportive services like transportation and childcare, and partner closely with community colleges and workforce organizations, participants don't just temporarily comply with requirements, they pursue pathways that result in wages that lead to better stability and less use of SNAP⁵.

Updating the definition of "employment and training programs" is a practical, bipartisan step that aligns policy with employer demand and economic reality. It enables SNAP participants to build in demand skills more quickly, strengthens state educational attainment efforts, and ultimately reduces reliance on SNAP through higher wages and improved economic mobility.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

SNAP's outdated training rules prevent people from enrolling in in-demand credential and degree programs, limiting their ability to move into stable, higher-wage work.

New federal SNAP rules will reduce participation by 3.2 million people monthly, making it essential that SNAP/ SNAP E&T supports genuine workforce advancement rather than restricting it.

Updating the federal definition would align SNAP with Medicaid's approach to work and training requirements, strengthening workforce pipelines and simplifying cross-program compliance for states.

References

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- ² U.S. Congressional Budget Office. (2025, May). *Potential Effects on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program of Reconciliation Recommendations Pursuant to H. Con. Res. 14, as Ordered Reported by the House Committee on Agriculture on May 12, 2025*. https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2025-05/Klobuchar-Craig-Letter-SNAP_5-22-25.pdf
- ³ The United States Code. (n.d.). Title 7, Chapter 51: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title7/chapter51&edition=prelim>
- ⁴ Nyhof McLeod, E., Peltier Campbell, K., Mabel, Z., and Strohl, J. (2025, June). *Bridging the Middle-Skills Gap. Connecting a Diverse Workforce to Economic Opportunity Through Certificates and Associate's Degrees*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/cew-bridging_the_middle-skills_gap-es.pdf
- ⁵ The Institute for College Access & Success. (2023, August) *Removing SNAP's Restrictions on Education Beyond High School Better Supports Economic Growth & Security*. <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/National-SNAP-Attainment-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

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