



January 31, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We are writing to follow up on a petition submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on December 11, 2023, asking the agency to remove the interview requirement for eligible Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applicants to receive benefits.

It's hard to learn when you're hungry. And it's hard to finish a college degree when you have to choose between paying tuition and putting food on the table.

As you know, soaring college costs have made it harder for students to meet even the most basic needs while they complete their degree programs. New data indicates that 23% of undergraduate students face food insecurity,¹ and studies show that food-insecure students are less likely to obtain their undergraduate degree than food-secure students.² SNAP should be a lifeline for these students, helping them to make ends meet while they work toward graduation. Unfortunately, countless students are shut out of the program because they fail to meet the interview requirement.

In 2021, an analysis of SNAP enrollment data in California showed that 31% of applicants in Los Angeles County were denied benefits due to missing their interview, compared to just 6% who were denied because of ineligibility.³ Missed-interview denials were even higher among working families and college students, affecting as many as 40% of otherwise eligible applicants, the study found.⁴ Further, a 2018 report from the Government Accountability Office found that only 43% of potentially eligible students at risk of food insecurity collected SNAP benefits in 2016.⁵

¹ See [New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity](#), Aug. 2023

² See [The Effect of Food Insecurity During College on Graduation and Type of Degree Attained](#), Feb. 2022

³ See [Think Big, Start Small: How Implementing Flexible Interviews Improves Benefit Delivery](#), Dec. 2021

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ [Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits](#), Dec. 2018

It is clear that the interview requirement has become a burdensome hurdle that is separating eligible students from much-needed aid. Yet this requirement is not mandated by the law governing SNAP—it is a regulation that USDA has the power to repeal.

We ask for your support in advocating for this policy change so that no college student in America has to worry about where their next meal is going to come from.

Sincerely,

[Student Defense](#)
[California Competes](#)
[California Student Aid Commission](#)
[Hope Center at Temple University](#)
[The Institute for College Access & Success \(TICAS\)](#)
[Young Invincibles](#)
[Nourish California](#)
[Higher Learning Advocates](#)
[Center for Higher Education Policy and Practice at SNHU](#)
[Food for People](#)
[San Diego Hunger Coalition](#)
[Food Share of Ventura County](#)
[Swipe Out Hunger](#)
[Center for Law and Social Policy \(CLASP\)](#)
[The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank](#)
[The Education Trust](#)
[New America Higher Education Program](#)
[SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center](#)
[Campus Compact](#)
[Washington Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition](#)
[Maryland Hunger Solutions](#)
[Generation Hope](#)
[Food Research and Action Center](#)
[Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger](#)
[Hunger Free Colorado](#)
[William E. Morris Institute for Justice](#)

Attachments:

[Section 553\(e\) Rulemaking Petition](#)