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Governor Cuomo Announces Actions to Expand Eligibility and Ease Access to Food Assistance for New Yorkers

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Eligibility Boosted for Up to Nearly 75,000 Community College Students

Elderly and Disabled New Yorkers Can Now Use New Simplified Application for Food Benefits

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced actions aimed at reducing food insecurity among community college students, older adults and disabled New Yorkers. These actions include expanding Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program eligibility to up to nearly 75,000 low-income college students enrolled in career or technical education course work and shortening the SNAP application for those on fixed incomes in an effort to encourage greater enrollment among eligible older adults and disabled individuals.

"From the community college student seeking to advance their career to the senior living on a fixed income, food insecurity and hunger are a reality for a wide breadth of low-income New Yorkers and we have an obligation to help them during their time in need," **Governor Cuomo said.** "These measures will help a greater number of individuals and families access benefits that will prevent them from facing the dire reality of food insecurity."

Under Governor Cuomo's direction, the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance worked with the State University of New York and City University of New York to implement a new policy expanding SNAP eligibility to low-income college students engaged at least half-time in career and technical education courses. The expanded eligibility will help students avoid food insecurity while advancing their education.

Income-eligible students enrolled at least half-time in a career or technical education program offered at a SUNY, CUNY, comprehensive, technical, or community college will now be eligible for SNAP. Additionally, income-eligible

individuals attending any of the 10 Educational Opportunity Centers in New York State and enrolled at least half-time in a career and technical education program, remedial courses, basic adult education, literacy, or English as a second language will be also be included in this new policy. Previously, these students did not qualify for SNAP assistance, unless they met certain criteria such as working at least 20 hours per week, or caring for a child, or were unable to work, among others.

This policy change adds another criteria that would allow certain college students and EOC participants to meet the student eligibility requirement for SNAP. Through SUNY and CUNY community colleges, technology campuses, EOCs, and Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking centers, nearly 75,000 students attend part time to take career and vocational courses. At SUNY, about 31,000 students are in those programs and may be eligible. At CUNY, about 42,000 students may be eligible.

Governor Cuomo also directed OTDA to seek permission from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to offer a simplified application for SNAP benefits in an effort to encourage greater enrollment among eligible elderly or disabled individuals. SNAP applicants on a fixed income or with limited financial resources can complete a single sheet application, front and back, which will greatly reduce the amount of time and effort required to apply or recertify for benefits.

Although New York is the national leader for the rate of SNAP participation among adults age 60, older, or disabled, this rate is still lower than the state's overall average. About 70 percent of eligible seniors and disabled individuals are enrolled to receive benefits, which is significantly lower than the statewide participation rate estimate of roughly 93 percent.

One leading reason proposed for this lower participation is the length and complexity of the application forms to apply for SNAP. The regular application includes nine pages of questions and information geared at determining a household's eligibility. Because many elderly and disabled individuals live on fixed incomes and generally experience far fewer household changes, much less information is required to verify their eligibility and calculate benefits.

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York State has made a strong commitment to fighting hunger and SNAP has been a key part of those efforts. The Governor has launched several groundbreaking initiatives to bring healthier foods to underserved communities, including expanding SNAP, eliminating unnecessary requirements and simplifying the application process, removing key barriers to reducing hunger for children and adults, while continuing efforts to maximize benefits for all those who are eligible.

In his 2018 State of the State address, the Governor announced a five-point plan to combat hunger for students in kindergarten through college. As part of that plan, the Governor tasked SUNY and CUNY with the establishment of physical food pantries on campus or stigma-free access to free food, which was completed that year.

At SUNY, in addition to the expansion of and access to food pantries, a task force helped establish and grow innovative intervention programs on campuses, including mobile food trucks, local farm crop sharing, a subsidized on campus grocery store, and programming that allows students to "pay" a campus parking ticket in food donations to an on-campus pantry.

The Healthy CUNY program employs a multifaceted approach to address food insecurity on CUNY campuses. To date, food pantries or food vouchers are available at 18 CUNY 2- and 4-year campuses.

Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance Commissioner Mike Hein said, "Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, we continue to help an increasing number of low-income individuals and families avoid the crushing feeling of food insecurity. These changes will help numerous college students and older New Yorkers qualify for SNAP, ensuring they can more easily afford healthy, nutritious food."

SUNY Chancellor Jim Malatras said, "Food insecurity continues to be a significant struggle for far too many Americans, and New York State has been a leader in our approach to getting resources to those most in need—through food banks on every college campus or nearby, and through innovative programs like mobile food trucks, local farm crop sharing, and even gardens on campus. And today by expanding eligibility for SNAP benefits, we are telling students your course work is vitally important and we want you to stay on track to get the credentials you need. My thanks to Governor Cuomo for leading our state's efforts to provide food security, and to Commissioner Hein and CUNY Chancellor Rodríguez in this collaboration to get additional benefits to our students most in need."

CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez said, "I applaud Governor Cuomo for prioritizing the growing problem of food insecurity. We have long known the grave impact of this scarcity on student retention and success, and it is magnified in this time of pandemic. Thanks to this innovative and needed initiative, CUNY has been able to work with the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to make students who are enrolled in career or technical education programs eligible to receive SNAP assistance, which we know to be an invaluable weapon in the battle against food insecurity. CUNY has always approached student hunger with a sense of urgency, and we are grateful to have partners who share our interest in connecting more students in need to life-altering resources."

Office for the Aging Acting Director Greg Olsen said, "These important actions announced today by Governor Cuomo build upon previous success that will make it easier for older New Yorkers to receive much needed benefits to combat hunger and food insecurity. Food is medicine, and the one-page simplified SNAP application will help thousands of older adults access hundreds of dollars a month in benefits that will help them make ends meet and improve their health."

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Translations

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