

STREAMLINE SNAP ACCESS FOR TEXANS RE-ENTERING SOCIETY

BACKGROUND

At any given time, nearly 300,000 Texans are on parole or probation. These Texans reenter their communities with a set of complex needs and challenges including chronic health conditions, unstable housing, and impediments to finding and retaining quality employment. Many struggle to reintegrate and a large share are rearrested or reincarcerated within a few years of release.



Research shows that formerly incarcerated people are especially vulnerable immediately after release. Early access to a robust set of supports at this time can help these Texans attain self-sufficiency and avoid rearrest and reincarceration.



The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical part of this reentry support infrastructure, providing basic food assistance and supplementing inadequate income.

PROBLEM

Federal SNAP rules require that states process applications within 30 days of an individual filing the request. However, recent staffing shortages at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HSSC) have pushed this processing time to over 60 days. For Texans leaving the criminal justice system with no means to afford groceries, this delay leads to hunger and undermines their reentry.



SOLUTION

Several states have decided to address this issue by allowing people who are incarcerated to apply for SNAP prior to release, so that benefits can be available immediately upon release. Ensuring access to food upon release means that people leaving the criminal justice system can focus on finding a job and reuniting with family.



Texas should allow people who are incarcerated to pre-register for SNAP prior to release. This commonsense policy ensures that formerly incarcerated people can meet their basic needs, supports the reentry process, and reduces recidivism.



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