

Stop food stamp cuts!

written by Struggle-La Lucha Baltimore bureau
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SLL photo: Sharon Black

Food stamp benefits are being reduced across the board on March 1, with 42 million seeing cuts ranging from \$82 to \$328 a month per household. Seniors could see

reductions from \$281 to as little as \$23 per month.

The emergency increase of food stamp benefits enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic was ended, effective March 1, by Congress and signed into law by President Biden last December.

The cuts will include the restart of eligibility determination for food stamps, Medicaid, and other social benefits, which was halted in March 2020 when the Trump administration declared that the COVID pandemic was a national emergency. Hundreds of thousands of households and individuals will be cut off every month, with millions cut by the end of the year.

The reduction in food stamps (officially called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP) actually began on Feb. 1, when 18 states began the cuts as soon as it was legally possible.

The numbers affected on March 1, state by state, are painful. The top 16 include: California, 2.93 million people; New York, 1.61 million; Texas, 1.34 million; Illinois, 1.06 million; Pennsylvania, 1.04 million; North Carolina, 813,000; Michigan, 705,000; Ohio, 673,000; Massachusetts, 629,000; Washington, 518,000; Virginia, 470,000; Oregon, 416,000; Alabama, 393,000; New Jersey, 388,000; Maryland, 360,000; and Wisconsin, 347,000.

Congress cut food stamps as food price inflation is spreading, with no sign of letup. Food at home prices rose by 11.3% in 2022. Eggs led the way, up 32.2%. Cereals and bakery products were up 15.6%; meats, poultry, and fish were up 8.1%; dairy was up 14%.

At a Feb. 27 protest of the food stamp cuts in Baltimore, the Peoples Power Assembly, the Matthew Henson Neighborhood Association, the Unemployed Workers Union, and others demanded that the cuts be reversed immediately and

that the food stamp program be expanded due to the continuing inflation crisis.

Dr. Marvin “Doc” Cheatham, Matthew Henson Neighborhood Association and civil rights advocate, said: “The federal government must address this crisis, but local, state, and city governments can and must act too. Everyone from the mayor to the governor can and must find the resources to keep people from starving and suffering!”

The Rev. Annie Chambers, Douglas Homes housing advocate and Peoples Power Assembly organizer, declared: “They can find \$100 billion for the Ukraine war, but nothing for the people. This is an outrage! Food stamps must be extended, not cut.”

Baltimore is already hard-hit by “food deserts” (neighborhoods with little or no access to affordable, nutritious food) and what activists are calling “Baltimore food apartheid.”

Groups have banded together in a campaign to “End Food Apartheid in Baltimore.” They are demanding that the food stamp program be expanded, including lowering requirements to allow seniors and low-wage workers more access.

The campaign has called for rolling back prices, including enacting a people’s control board that has the power to freeze and rollback prices, and enacting stiff penalties for price gougers.

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‘Our program’

Following is the program organizers announced at a news conference outside Baltimore City Hall:

“Baltimore community groups are joining together to fight for people’s right to affordable, nutritious food. If Under Armour can receive ‘opportunity zone’ status and downtown businesses can receive financial benefits, why not Baltimore’s neighborhoods?

“We believe that it is time to put an end to food apartheid in Baltimore. When we began our work, there were four areas that we identified as ‘food deserts,’ including West Baltimore, Pigtown, Oliver East, and Cherry Hill. Those boundaries have widened, and with growing inflation, most communities, with the exception of wealthy areas, are facing hardship and hunger.

“This is why we are submitting the following proposals for change. Where it is possible, we welcome government officials negotiating with existing supermarket chains to locate in these neighborhoods. But we cannot wait or rely on the goodwill of for-profit food chains. Comprehensive action is needed!

“Action is needed on a city, state, and federal level. It includes city council members, the mayor, the Baltimore Health Department, and the governor.

“Create publicly owned and subsidized markets at the previous sites of closed markets or at locations designated by the community.

- Train and hire residents from each affected area.
- Protect and guarantee union rights for all workers in subsidized supermarkets.

“Rollback food prices.

- Restore emergency allotments for food stamps to address the inflation crisis.

- Lower requirements to extend food stamp programs, especially for seniors and low-wage workers.
- Workers' and people's control board to roll back and freeze prices.
- Enact penalties for price gougers.

"Support and fund Black owned food-coops, gardens, and farms.

"Community control of vacant city lots for people's gardens.

"Immediately enact transportation and food distribution plan for seniors, youth, disabled and poor residents.

- Weekly bus routes to supermarkets from affected communities.
- Delivery of food to those in need and emergency preparation.

"Community control of redevelopment.

- Form Community Action Committees in each area.
- Citywide Commission made up of representatives from affected communities to determine action.

"Mayor and City Council to call for national aid – over \$100 billion has already been spent on the U.S./NATO proxy war on Russia. Time to feed the people, not the Pentagon."

