
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that many low-income
2 households struggle to purchase food due to Hawai'i's high cost
3 of living and food prices. The supplemental nutrition
4 assistance program (SNAP), formerly known as the food stamp
5 program, is crucial to providing necessary food assistance to
6 some of Hawai'i's most economically disadvantaged residents.

7 The legislature further finds that households with incomes
8 above two hundred per cent of the federal poverty level, as
9 established by the United States Department of Agriculture; are
10 ineligible for SNAP benefits, yet these households are still
11 unable to achieve self-sufficiency. As highlighted by the 2023
12 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report, a
13 family of four earning an income of \$69,000 per year is
14 ineligible for SNAP benefits but needs an income of over
15 \$100,000 per year to meet its basic needs, including housing and
16 food. If the family earned just \$1,000 less per year, or



1 \$68,000, it would be eligible to receive more than \$9,000 in
2 SNAP benefits.

3 The legislature further finds that the two hundred per cent
4 poverty level eligibility cutoff for SNAP assistance creates an
5 extreme benefits cliff in which an additional \$1 per month
6 earned by a household can result in thousands of dollars' worth
7 of lost benefits each year. In addition, the SNAP benefits
8 cliff disincentivizes individuals from reaching their greatest
9 earning potential. Many families just below the SNAP income
10 eligibility threshold decline pay increases because the
11 financial benefit of pursuing economic opportunities does not
12 exceed the potential cost of losing SNAP food assistance.

13 The legislature additionally finds that SNAP is the most
14 effective anti-hunger initiative in the country. In Hawai'i, the
15 program supports over one hundred thirty thousand individuals,
16 bringing more than \$630,000,000 into the State's economy each
17 year. Raising the SNAP benefits ceiling to three hundred per
18 cent of the federal poverty level will help economically
19 vulnerable households meet their basic needs without sacrificing
20 their financial security. This can be done by appropriating
21 state funding to cover the cost of SNAP benefits for families



1 who do not qualify for federal assistance, with households who
2 currently quality for federal benefits continuing to receive
3 federal aid.

4 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to provide
5 supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits for
6 individuals and households whose monthly income is equal to or
7 less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

8 SECTION 2. Chapter 346, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
9 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated
10 and to read as follows:

11 "§346- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program;
12 eligibility. (a) Any individual or household whose monthly
13 income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the
14 federal poverty level and who meets all other criteria for the
15 supplemental nutrition assistance program established by the
16 United States Department of Agriculture shall be eligible for
17 supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits.

18 (b) Funds appropriated for the purposes of this section
19 may be used to subsidize the cost of providing supplemental
20 nutrition assistance program benefits for individuals and
21 households whose monthly income is equal to or less than three



1 hundred per cent of the federal poverty level; provided that
2 these funds shall only be used to subsidize benefits for a
3 qualifying individual or household whose benefits are not
4 subsidized by federal funding.

5 (c) All supplemental nutrition assistance shall be
6 calculated using the federal supplemental nutrition assistance
7 benefit formula established by the United States Department of
8 Agriculture."

9 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
10 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$50,000,000 or so
11 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and
12 the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal
13 year 2026-2027 to provide supplemental nutrition assistance
14 program benefits for households whose monthly income is equal to
15 or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty
16 level.

17 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department
18 of human services for the purposes of this Act.

19 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.
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1 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

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INTRODUCED BY:



JAN 17 2025



H.B. NO. 539

Report Title:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Eligibility;
Appropriations

Description:

Expands eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. Appropriates funds.

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