
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 food security is an
2 essential part of financial stability. To strengthen the
3 financial security of formerly incarcerated individuals, the
4 United States Department of Agriculture established a prisoner
5 pre-release supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP)
6 administrative waiver, which allows states to process SNAP
7 applications and conduct eligibility interviews for individuals
8 who are about to be released from prison or jail. The purpose
9 of the waiver is to reduce recidivism by strengthening food
10 security for individuals reentering the community after
11 correctional confinement. To date, thirteen states have
12 received a waiver to accept pre-release SNAP applications,
13 according to the United States Department of Agriculture's Food
14 and Nutrition Service.

15 The legislature further finds that federal law permanently
16 disqualifies household members convicted of a federal or state
17 felony offense involving the possession, use, or distribution of



1 a controlled substance after August 22, 1996. However, federal
2 law allows state legislatures to opt out of the disqualification
3 or modify the disqualification to impose a less severe
4 restriction. Hawaii state law currently allows only individuals
5 convicted of a felony offense involving the possession, use, or
6 distribution of a controlled substance who have successfully
7 completed or are complying with a treatment program to receive
8 SNAP benefits, which restricts access to basic food assistance
9 based on the availability of drug rehabilitation programs.
10 Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have opted out
11 of this requirement entirely and impose no SNAP disqualification
12 related to controlled substances offenses.

13 The legislature also finds that the department of human
14 services is in the process of updating its benefits eligibility
15 solution to automate tasks that are currently performed manually
16 and expand the department's capacity to address the needs of
17 benefit program recipients. During the regular session of 2025,
18 the department indicated a preference for accounting for the
19 upgrade timeline in public policy changes impacting social
20 services so that department officials have time to plan for the
21 implementation of changes.



1 The purpose of this Act is to:

2 (1) Require the department of human services to seek a
3 federal waiver to establish a pre-release SNAP
4 application process for inmates nearing release and to
5 implement the process upon obtaining the waiver by
6 January 1, 2028; and

7 (2) Allow all individuals convicted of an offense
8 involving the possession, use, or distribution of a
9 controlled substance to apply for SNAP benefits,
10 regardless of treatment status.

11 SECTION 2. Chapter 346, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
12 amended by adding a new section to part II to be appropriately
13 designated and to read as follows:

14 "§346- Supplemental nutrition assistance program;
15 pre-release application process. (a) In accordance with federal
16 guidance, the department shall establish a pre-release
17 supplemental nutrition assistance program application process
18 for individuals who are incarcerated and scheduled for release.

19 The department shall:



- 1 (1) Partner with correctional facilities to identify
2 eligible individuals within a specified time frame
3 before their release date;
- 4 (2) Facilitate the completion and submission of
5 supplemental nutrition assistance program applications
6 so that benefits, if approved, are available
7 immediately upon or shortly after release;
- 8 (3) Provide information, counseling, and assistance
9 regarding supplemental nutrition assistance program
10 eligibility criteria to incarcerated individuals
11 transitioning back into the community;
- 12 (4) Seek any necessary federal waivers, approvals, or
13 clarifications to effectuate this section; and
- 14 (5) Comply with all applicable federal rules governing
15 supplemental nutrition assistance program application
16 and eligibility processes, ensuring that no benefits
17 are issued to an incarcerated individual before the
18 individual's release.
- 19 (b) The department may adopt rules pursuant to chapter 91
20 to effectuate the purposes of this section."



1 SECTION 3. Section 346-53.3, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
2 amended to read as follows:

3 "[~~†~~]§346-53.3[~~†~~] **Temporary assistance for needy families**
4 **and [~~feed stamps~~] supplemental nutrition assistance program for**
5 **individuals with a felony conviction [~~which~~] that has as an**
6 **element the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled**
7 **substance.** [~~Section~~] (a) For purposes of the temporary
8 assistance for needy families program, section 115(a) of Public
9 Law 104-193 shall not apply in Hawaii to persons who are
10 complying with treatment or who have not refused or failed to
11 comply with treatment.

12 (b) For purposes of the supplemental nutrition assistance
13 program, section 115(a) of Public Law 104-193 shall not apply in
14 Hawaii."

15 SECTION 4. This Act does not affect rights and duties that
16 matured, penalties that were incurred, and proceedings that were
17 begun before its effective date.

18 SECTION 5. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
19 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.



1 SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect upon its approval;
2 provided that section 2 shall take effect on January 1, 2028.



Report Title:

DHS; SNAP; Incarcerated Individuals; Felony Drug Offenders; Pre-Release Application Process

Description:

By 1/1/2028, requires the Department of Human Services, upon obtaining a federal waiver, to establish a pre-release Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application process for inmates nearing release. Allows all individuals convicted of an offense involving the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance to apply for SNAP benefits, regardless of treatment status. (CD1)

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