

ACT 264

S.B. NO. 960

A Bill for an Act Relating to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

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

The legislature further finds that SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger initiative in the country. In Hawaii, SNAP supports over one hundred thirty thousand individuals, bringing more than \$630,000,000 into the State's economy each year. These benefits help economically vulnerable households meet their basic nutritional needs without sacrificing their financial security.

The legislature additionally finds that a study co-authored by the university of Hawaii economic research organization and Hawaii Public Health Institute found that eliminating the net income limit criteria for SNAP beneficiaries would provide an additional \$45,000,000 in benefits to struggling families across the State and expand eligibility for thirteen thousand to fourteen thousand more households, with each household receiving an average of \$3,200 annually in food assistance. In September 2024, Governor Josh Green subsequently announced that the State would remove the net income limit criteria to strengthen Hawaii's social welfare system for working-class families.

The legislature also finds that SNAP access and participation rates are hampered by understaffing at the department of human services. Improvements to SNAP in the State, including elimination of the net income limit, will only be effective if they are able to be fully implemented, which will require additional staffing for the department of human services. Moreover, since SNAP benefits are federally reimbursable, increasing staff to increase the State's SNAP program's participation rate could generate hundreds of millions of dollars in federal revenue to combat food insecurity in local communities.

Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to appropriate funds to the department of human services to enhance access to and participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance program.

SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$1,100,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to strengthen access to the supplemental nutrition assistance program by:

- (1) Authorizing differential pay increases for positions related to the facilitation of the supplemental nutrition assistance program;
- (2) Establishing new positions to improve access to the supplemental nutrition assistance program, particularly for economically disadvantaged communities; and
- (3) Undertaking any other programs or initiatives the department of human services deems effective in improving supplemental nutrition assistance program participation rates.

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

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

(Approved July 1, 2025.)