

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislative Package to Combat Food Insecurity in New Jersey

09/30/2021

TRENTON – During Hunger Action Month, Governor Phil Murphy today signed into law a comprehensive legislation package aimed at combatting food insecurity, reaffirming his commitment to end hunger in New Jersey. The six bills will commit to addressing hunger by expanding access to the New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and its benefits, bolstering school meal programs, and establishing the Office of the Food Insecurity Advocate. Additionally, the Governor also signed A5690 which directs the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development to include information on SNAP on any materials pertaining to unemployment compensation benefits.

"It is unacceptable that so many of our most vulnerable people are going without enough food," **said Governor Murphy**. "With today's bill signings, we are continuing our ongoing commitment to end food insecurity in New Jersey by strengthening food assistance and providing support to communities across the state."

"Access to food is a fundamental human need and no one in our state should go hungry or have to skip a meal," **said Human Services Acting Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "We are committed to improving access to SNAP, our country's first line of defense against hunger, so New Jerseyans have the food assistance they need. We are proud to take these additional steps to end hunger and achieve food security for New Jerseyans of all ages. I thank Governor Murphy for signing these important bills and applaud Speaker Coughlin and the leadership of our legislative partners and advocates. With these new laws, together we will move closer to accomplishing our shared goal of ensuring no one in New Jersey goes hungry."

"We place the highest value on children having access to meals," **said Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher**. "The funding from these bills for the Summer Food Service Program, the Seamless Summer Option, and Breakfast After the Bell will provide consistent nutrition all year long."

"Like Governor Murphy, the New Jersey Department of Labor believes in a whole-of-government approach to assisting our residents in times of need, such as when they are unemployed," **said Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo**. "This new law will augment our ongoing efforts to link unemployment claimants to additional vital resources our state provides."

Governor Murphy signed the following bills into law:

S3945/A5884 (Vitale, Madden/Coughlin, Mazzeo, Conaway, Wimberly) Establishes Office of Food Insecurity Advocate.

A2281/S1078 (Armato, Mazzeo, Vainieri Huttle/Greenstein, Turner) Requires Commissioner of Human Services to streamline SNAP application process for senior citizens and conduct outreach regarding senior SNAP participation.

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A5880/S3941 (Coughlin, Armato, Verrelli, Wimberly/Vitale, Gopal) Directs the Department of Human Services to develop mobile software for SNAP recipients; appropriates \$2 million.

A5882/S3943 (Coughlin, Armato, Verrelli, Conaway/Vitale, Madden) Establishes State supplement for federal summer food service program meals.

A5883/S3944 (Schaer, Speight, Zwicker, Stanley/Ruiz, Turner) Establishes State supplement for "breakfast after the bell" meals.

A5690/S3772 (Greenwald, Conaway, Benson/Greenstein, Turner) Requires the Department of Labor & Workforce Development to provide link to New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition

"Breakfast After the Bell is an essential tool for combatting food insecurity among school aged children. Now that students are allowed to eat in their classrooms, during the school day, more families can take advantage of free breakfast," **said Senator Teresa Ruiz**. "Establishing a state supplement that will be funded annually guarantees provision and support for this critical program which ensures that students have the fuel they need to focus and succeed throughout their school day."

"SNAP should be easily accessible for all recipients, many of whom will now be able to use mobile devices to keep up with their accounts and help them find retail stores nearby that participate in the program," **said Senator Joe Vitale, Chair of the Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee**. "Streamlining access to SNAP benefits is a practical way forward in the 21st century, and will allow recipients greater flexibility. Mobile-friendly software will make it easier for recipients to make changes, check balances and keep track of their benefits."

"Making use of mobile-friendly software to allow for the distribution of SNAP benefits beyond the traditional beginning of the month window will ensure that recipients have access to the food items they need without having to worry about shortages," **said Senator Vin Gopal**. "SNAP recipients will be able to shop at the grocery store stress-free throughout the month, and will also be able to keep track of the processing status of documents that is so important to the program."

"The Summer Food Service Program's goal is to provide nutritious meals and snacks to children in low-income areas during the summer months when school is not in session," **said Senator Fred Madden**. "This bill will ensure that children will be able to continue to receive nutritious meals that they may not be able to access elsewhere outside of the traditional school year."

"SNAP benefits have always been our first line of defense in fighting hunger," **said Senator Shirley Turner**. "Making it easier for senior citizens and people who are out of work to apply for programs like SNAP helps to reduce food insecurity, lift our residents out of poverty, and enable them to spend more on groceries that will keep them healthy. Increasing our SNAP participation rates also brings more federal dollars to our state and helps pump more money into our local and state economies. Closing the gaps in SNAP participation is a win-win for New Jersey, our senior citizens, and our families."

"SNAP is a great program and a huge asset to many of our residents struggling to make ends meet, and can be utilized in-store or online at ShopRite, Amazon, Walmart, the Fresh Grocer, and ALDI," **said Senator Linda Greenstein**. "However, this program is vastly underutilized, leaving many qualifying individuals - especially our senior citizens and those seeking unemployment benefits - without the assistance they need. These laws will be a critical help in ensuring that all eligible individuals are receiving the services they need and deserve."

Assistance Program on website and in emails concerning unemployment compensation benefits.

"Food security and access to proper nutrition are determining factors in every individual's capacity to realize their full potential," **said Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin**. "The legislation signed today ensures the food needs of our most vulnerable in New Jersey continue to be met and strengthens our delivery of SNAP benefits and school meals. Most significantly, by creating a Food Insecurity Advocate, we are going to be better equipped as a state to strategically coordinate our anti-hunger initiatives, so no family misses out on access to critical food aid."

“Programs such as SNAP provide invaluable assistance to families who would otherwise have to wonder where their next meal will come from,” **said Assemblyman Vincent Armato**. “Modernizing access by providing mobile-friendly software would make it easier for New Jerseyans to view their SNAP case status, view their current benefits, request a replacement card, submit necessary documents, and more. A system that is easier to navigate is one that can ultimately help more residents. Additional funding will help schools achieve their goal of reaching as many hungry children as possible.”

“SNAP is an important program that provides food support to more than 800,000 New Jersey residents,” **said Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli**. “Finding ways to make it simpler for residents to navigate this system will help ensure more families receive the critical assistance they need.”

“Children who lack consistent access to nutritious food are more likely to experience physical, social and behavioral issues – including developmental impairments,” **said Assemblyman Herb Conaway**. “It is our state’s responsibility to maintain the health and well-being of our children by continuing to provide them with nutritious meals throughout the year.”

“Every child in our state deserves to start their day with a healthy, nutritious breakfast – regardless of their parents’ financial situation,” **said Assemblyman Gary Schaer**. “Supplementing existing programs with additional support will help ensure every child gets the nutrition they need.”

“Regular access to healthy meals is an important part of a child’s development,” **said Assemblywoman Shanique Speight**. “With more families facing economic hardship as we come out of this pandemic, it is essential we expand access to nutritious breakfasts for any child who needs them.”

“Food insecurity surged throughout our state as a result of the pandemic, with an increase of 75 percent for New Jersey children,” **said Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker**. “Those 365,000 children are counting on our state to help make sure they do not go hungry as their parents get back on their feet and recover from this pandemic.”

“Trying to focus on school work and extracurricular activities are practically impossible for students who are doing so on an empty stomach,” **said Assemblyman Sterley Stanley**. “It is vital to reduce food insecurity. Helping school districts supply meals to hungry students will improve their health and academic performance, providing them with what they need to succeed.”

“Less than half of New Jersey residents 60 and older who are eligible for SNAP benefits use them. This legislation looks to increase senior participation by simplifying the application process, allowing seniors to apply for SNAP through multiple points of entry, and utilizing a comprehensive community outreach and public awareness campaign,” **said Assemblymembers John Armato, Vincent Mazzeo, and Valerie Vainieri Huttel, in a joint statement**. “Taking these steps will increase the likelihood of seniors taking advantage of the SNAP benefits, so that they can maintain a healthy, nutritious diet. Access to SNAP benefits for many may also mean the difference between having food and going without.”

“Without a steady income to rely on, many people who are out of work understandably struggle to put food on the table. When unemployment soared last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity drastically increased as well – with more than 1 million residents in need of assistance,” **said Assemblymembers Louis Greenwald, Herb Conaway, and Daniel Benson, in a joint statement**. “Losing one’s job is already a stressful and destabilizing experience without having to worry about where your family’s next meal will come from. Including a link to the NJ SNAP website in unemployment-related communications from DOLWD is a simple and effective way to help spread the word about this program and make it easier for residents to access the benefits they need.”

“These measures will go a long way toward reducing hunger in the Garden State, especially for the tens of thousands of children who face hunger every day,” **said Adele LaTourette, Director of Hunger Free New Jersey**. “We applaud the Legislative leaders for advancing these important initiatives and Gov. Phil Murphy for supporting these measures. We look forward to working with the Murphy Administration to implement these changes.”

“The Food Democracy Collaborative applauds Governor Murphy’s and state lawmakers’ leadership for streamlining and optimizing existing food access programs and advancing food equity for all New Jerseyans,” **said Jeanine Cava, Co-Founder of the NJ Food Democracy Collaborative.** “These efforts help connect the dots and close gaps in food system governance which supports food security across the state. We look forward to working with our colleagues and partners in the state to connect more SNAP recipients to NJ’s agricultural bounty in the months ahead.”

“We welcome the signing of these bills which will strengthen access and coordination of food resources for our New Jerseyans in need and applaud the Governor and legislature for their continued focus on nourishing our neighbors,” **said Carlos Rodriguez, President and CEO, Community FoodBank of New Jersey.**

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