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# SNAP To It: Restoring Work Requirements Will Help Solve the Food Stamp Crisis

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The food stamp program is one of the largest and fastest-growing welfare entitlements in the federal budget. Total enrollment reached a whopping 48 million in 2013, one of many record highs plaguing the program. Skyrocketing enrollment has led federal spending on food stamps to more than quadruple since 2000, reaching another record-high of nearly \$80 billion in 2013.

One key cause of this out-of-control spending is the recent explosion of enrollment among able-bodied childless adults. Although federal law requires these adults to work in order to receive food stamps, the Obama administration has awarded an unprecedented number of waivers to states, allowing able-bodied childless adults to receive taxpayer-funded food stamp benefits without working at all.

The problem may seem purely fiscal: food stamp spending is consuming a growing portion of the federal budget, putting at risk other critical spending priorities. But the consequences of this enrollment explosion go beyond just billions of dollars. The elimination of work requirements has resulted in more people remaining trapped in government dependency for far longer than they otherwise would, has kept more people in poverty, has stymied economic growth, and has contributed to a massive expansion of the welfare state.

Reinstating work requirements for able-bodied childless adults receiving food stamps has proven profoundly successful in decreasing food stamp enrollment, returning more people to work, and even increasing volunteerism.

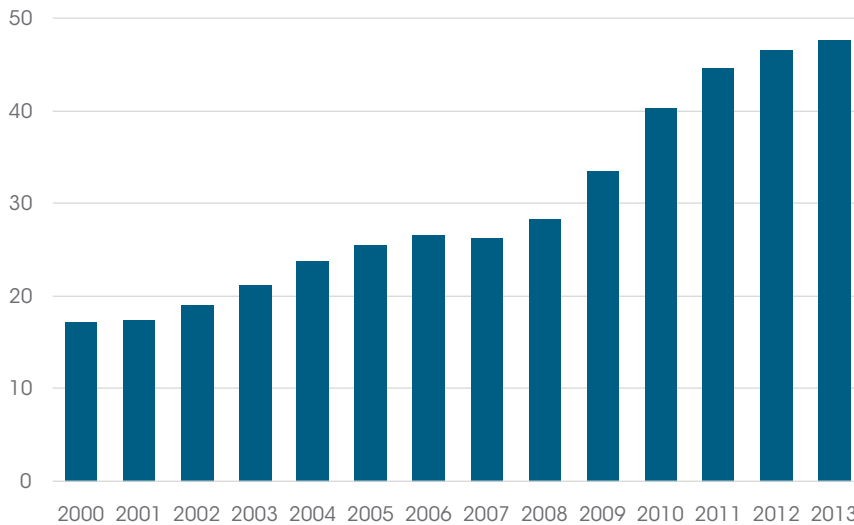
The way forward for states is simple and clear. Governors should just decline to renew the federal waivers that have eliminated work requirements for able-bodied childless adults on food stamps. Doing so would reduce welfare enrollment, save federal taxpayer dollars, lift more people out of poverty, increase self-sufficiency, and spur economic growth.

## THE FOOD STAMP ENROLLMENT CRISIS

The food stamp program, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is one of the largest and fastest-growing welfare entitlements in the federal budget. The number of people receiving food stamps reached nearly 48 million in 2013, a record high.<sup>1</sup> That is a whopping 177 percent more than the 17 million Americans enrolled in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

### Food stamp enrollment reaches record high

Annual SNAP enrollment, in millions



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

For comparison, the U.S. population grew just 12 percent over this same time period.<sup>3-4</sup> Worse yet, even though poverty rates are declining, the number of people receiving food stamps continues to climb.<sup>5-6</sup> To put this in perspective, total non-farm employment has risen by just three percent since 2000, despite the fact that the Great Recession ended in June 2009.<sup>7-8</sup>

### Millions more Americans are being added to food stamps than are finding jobs

Net change in food stamp enrollment and non-farm employment since 2000

#### Growth in Food Stamp Enrollment

30.4 million

#### Growth in Non-Farm Employment

4.3 million

Source: U.S. Department of Labor; U.S. Department of Agriculture

Skyrocketing enrollment has made the food stamp program one of the fastest-growing line items in the federal budget. Federal spending on food stamps reached a record high of nearly \$80 billion in 2013, up from just \$17 billion in 2000.<sup>9</sup> Food stamp spending is growing ten times as fast as federal revenues, crowding out critical resources for other spending priorities.<sup>10-11</sup>

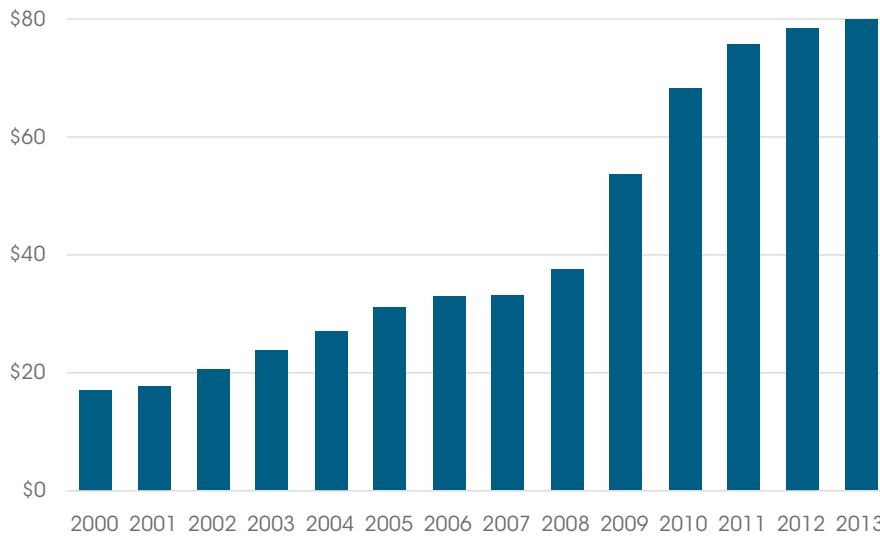


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## Federal spending on food stamps has more than quadrupled since 2000

Annual SNAP expenditures, in billions



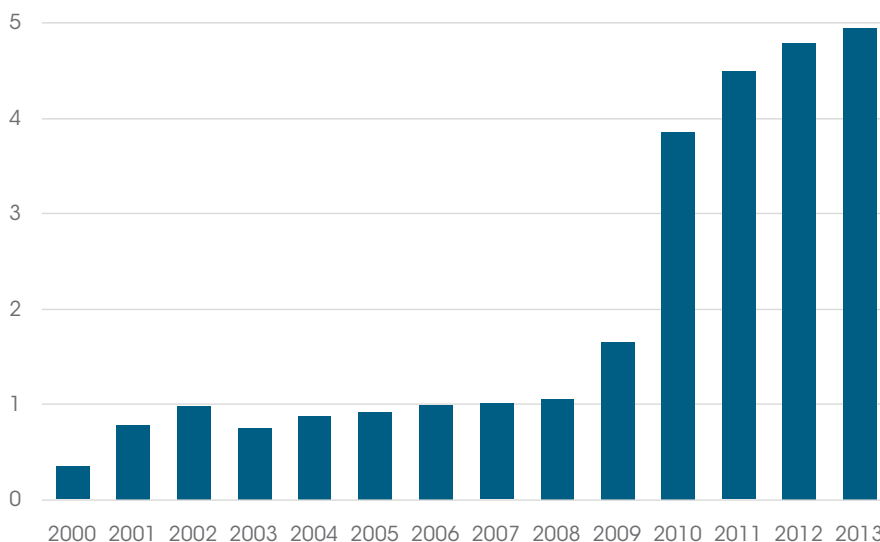
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

## WORK WAIVERS LEAD TO EXPLODING FOOD STAMP ENROLLMENT

Able-bodied childless adults represent one of the largest groups contributing to skyrocketing food stamp enrollment. From 2000 through 2008, the number of able-bodied childless adults receiving food stamps hovered at or below one million.<sup>12-20</sup> But by 2013, a record-high 4.9 million able-bodied childless adults were receiving food stamps.<sup>21-25</sup> Federal spending on food stamps for able-bodied adults skyrocketed to more than \$10 billion in 2013, up from just \$462 million in 2000.<sup>26-27</sup>

## The number of able-bodied childless adults on food stamps has exploded in recent years

Annual able-bodied childless adult SNAP enrollment, in millions



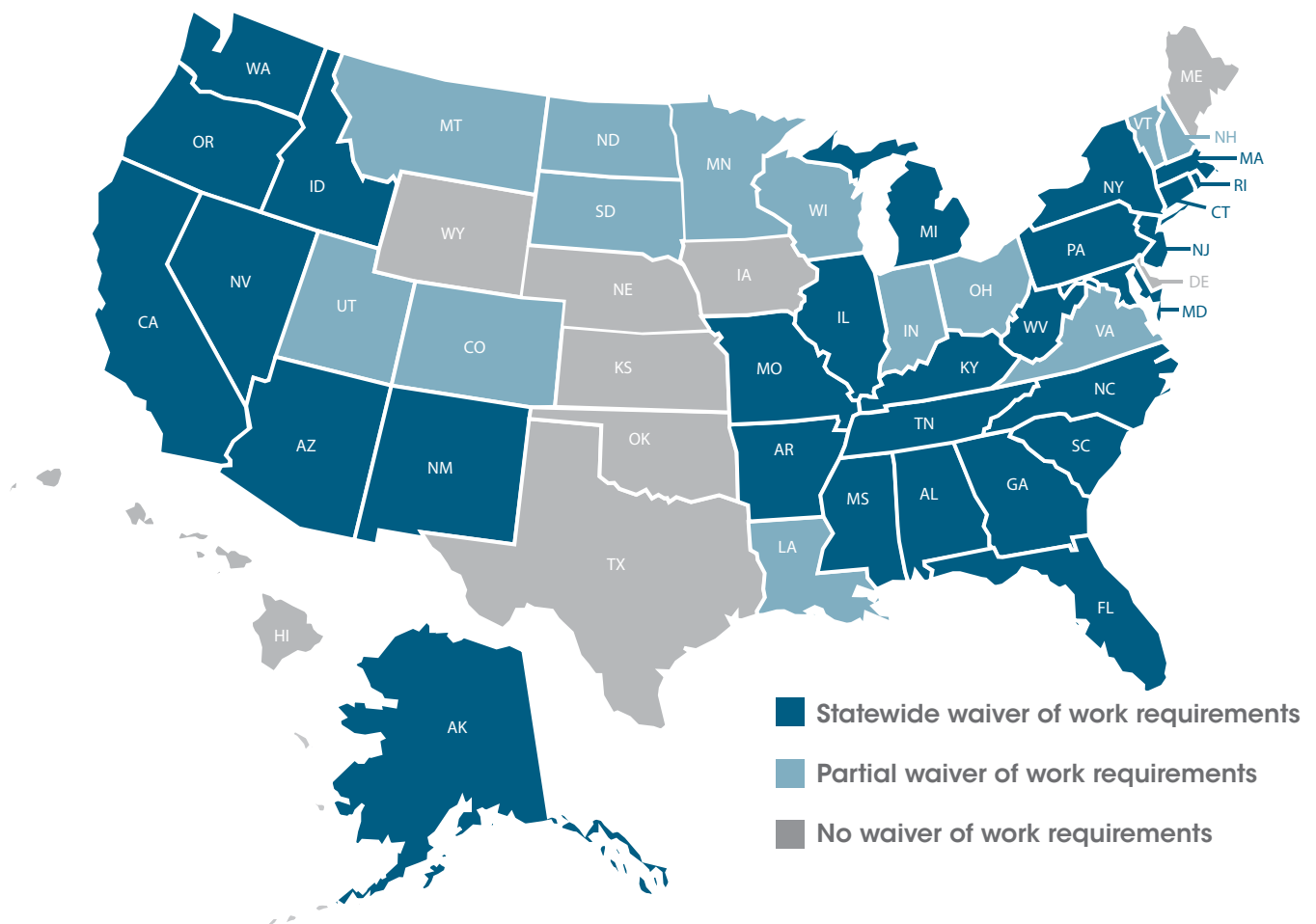
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

What is one key factor driving this enrollment explosion? States have been waiving work requirements for able-bodied adults on the program.

Federal law generally limits food stamp eligibility for non-disabled childless adults to just three months out of any three-year period unless they meet specified work requirements.<sup>28</sup> Childless adults are required to work or participate in employment or training programs for at least 20 hours per week.<sup>29</sup> These work requirements have become irrelevant in recent years, however, as states have been given waivers to exempt able-bodied adults from federal work requirements.

In 2006, just seven states had statewide waivers of work requirements for able-bodied childless adults.<sup>30</sup> But by 2013, the Obama administration had granted statewide waivers to 40 states and partial waivers to another six states.<sup>31-32</sup> Although the Obama administration offered statewide waivers to 36 states in 2015, only 29 states accepted.<sup>33-35</sup> Another 13 states have partial waivers, covering only certain regions or certain parts of the year.<sup>36</sup> These waivers for able-bodied adults without dependents have perpetuated poverty and trapped more people in government dependency.

### 42 states waived work requirements in 2015





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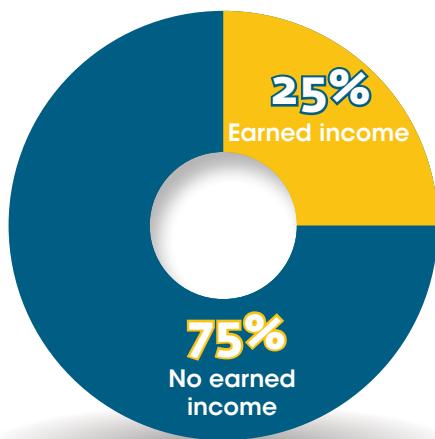
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## THE BEST SAFETY NET IS A JOB

With so many states waiving work requirements, it should come as no surprise that few able-bodied childless adults receiving food stamps actually work. In 2013, just one-quarter of childless adult households receiving food stamps had any earned income.<sup>37</sup> The remaining three-quarters had no earned income, meaning they were not working at all.<sup>38</sup> An analysis of food stamp recipients, conducted when work requirements went into effect, found that fewer than five percent of all able-bodied childless adults on the program were meeting those requirements.<sup>39</sup>

### Most childless adults on food stamps do not work

Childless adult households receiving food stamps, by earned income status



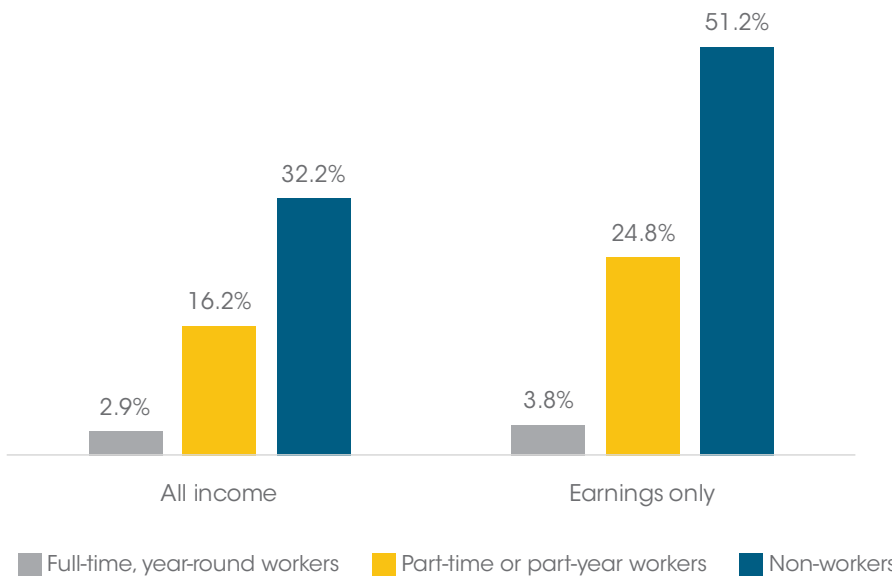
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Getting able-bodied adults back into the workforce is not only good for the economy, but also good for individuals previously trapped in government dependency. Work helps lift these adults out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. In fact, simply working a full-time, minimum wage job would move many able-bodied adults out of poverty entirely.<sup>40</sup>

Fewer than three percent of all non-disabled, full-time, year-round workers are in poverty, compared to nearly a third of non-workers.<sup>41</sup> This difference holds regardless of age, gender, education, race, citizenship or immigration status, region, or other demographic characteristics.<sup>42</sup> If the analysis is limited to earnings only—excluding supplemental income such as cash assistance welfare—the differences become even starker.<sup>43</sup>

## Working full-time raises most able-bodied adults out of poverty

Poverty rates for non-disabled, working-age adults, by work status



Source: Census Bureau

At-risk families with earned incomes are far less likely to accept food stamps than their non-working peers.<sup>44</sup> If they do enroll in food stamps, these working families generally exit the program sooner and are less likely to re-enroll later.<sup>45</sup> In fact, increased earnings has historically been one of the primary reasons for childless adults cycle off of the program.<sup>46</sup>

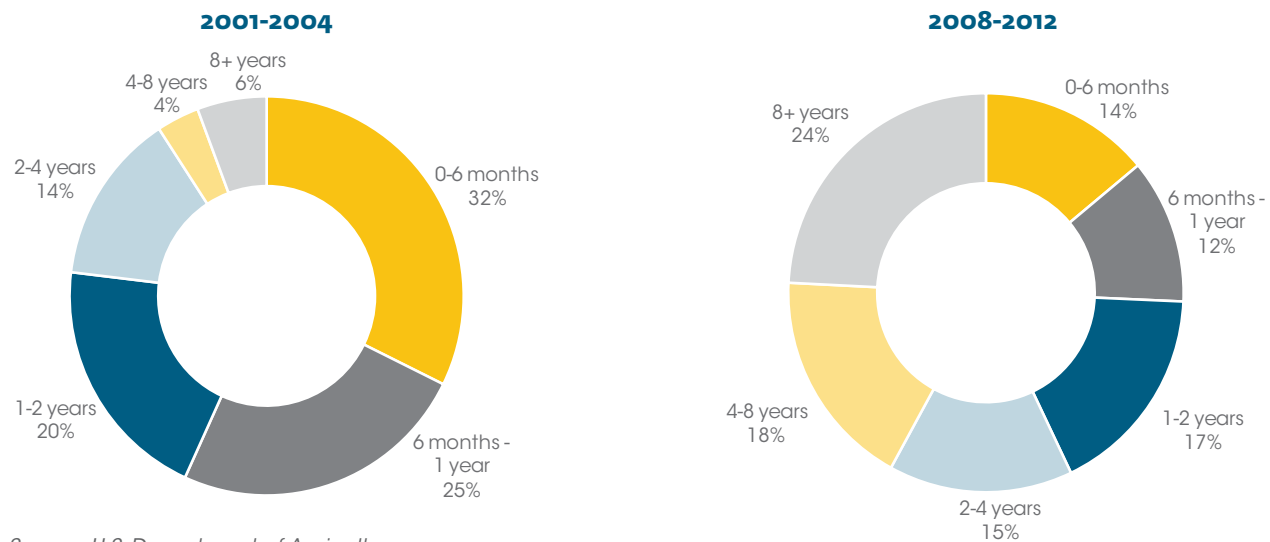
But when work requirements are waived, childless adults stay on the program far longer than they otherwise would. In the early 2000s, most childless adults receiving food stamps exited the program within a year.<sup>47</sup> Nearly a third of those childless adults exited within the first six months.<sup>48</sup> For comparison, fewer than six percent were enrolled for eight years or more.<sup>49</sup>

But able-bodied childless adults are staying on food stamps far longer now that work requirements have been waived in many states. Most childless adults now stay on food stamps for more than two years.<sup>50</sup> Just 14 percent of childless adults receiving food stamps exit within the first six months.<sup>51</sup> Nearly a quarter of able-bodied childless adults receive food stamps for more than eight years.<sup>52</sup> Restoring work requirements would go a long way toward getting able-bodied adults out of government dependency and back to self-sufficiency.



## Able-bodied adults are staying on food stamps longer than ever

Completed length of food stamp enrollment for non-disabled childless adults



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Lifting welfare recipients into full-time work has a long history of success. The work-first welfare reforms of the 1990s moved millions of welfare recipients into the labor force with work requirements, spurring greater economic growth.<sup>53</sup> Welfare caseloads plummeted, employment rose, and poverty rates dropped, particularly among the most at-risk populations.<sup>54</sup>

States can help restore the working class by reinstating federal work requirements for able-bodied adults on welfare. This solution is easy to achieve: states should simply decline to renew waivers of work requirements in the food stamps program. Doing so would increase labor force participation, spur economic growth, and move more individuals out of dependency and into self-sufficiency.

## SEVERAL STATES HAVE SUCCESSFULLY RESTORED WORK REQUIREMENTS

Several states have successfully restored federal work requirements for able-bodied adults receiving food stamps, with the ultimate goal of lifting more individuals out of government dependency and into self-sufficiency.

### CASE STUDY: MAINE RESTORES FOOD STAMP WORK REQUIREMENTS, SEES MASSIVE ENROLLMENT DROP

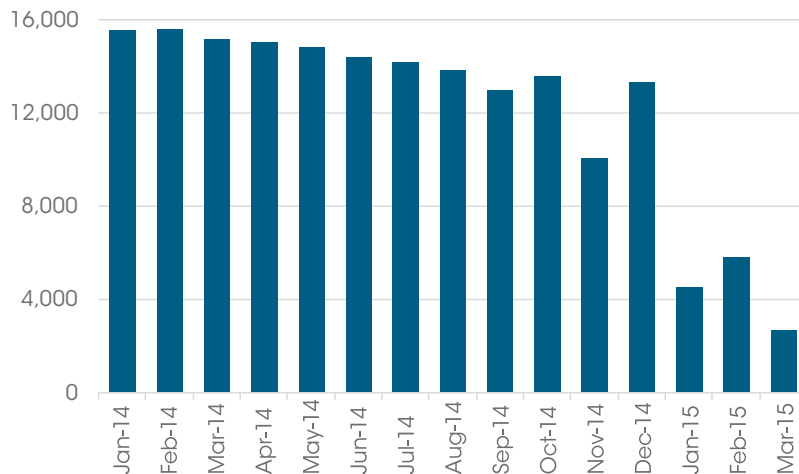
Maine Governor Paul LePage restored federal work requirements in the state's food stamp program in October 2014, after six years of the state operating under a waiver.<sup>55</sup> Childless adults receiving food stamps who refused to work were cycled off the program beginning in January 2015, after reaching the three-month time limit.

The number of able-bodied childless adults receiving food stamps in 2014 stayed relatively stable, averaging just over 14,000 enrollees each month.<sup>56</sup> But after the work requirement went into effect, the number of childless adults receiving food stamps plummeted. By January 2015, enrollment had dropped to just 4,500 able-bodied childless adults.<sup>57</sup> Although enrollment saw a slight uptick in February, fewer than 2,700 able-bodied childless adults were receiving food stamps in March.<sup>58</sup> Not only are able-bodied adults moving off of food stamps, but charities in Maine have seen an incredible surge in the number of people volunteering their time.<sup>59</sup>



## Food stamp enrollment plummeted after Maine restored federal work requirements

Monthly able-bodied childless adult SNAP enrollment in Maine



Source: Maine Department of Health and Human Services

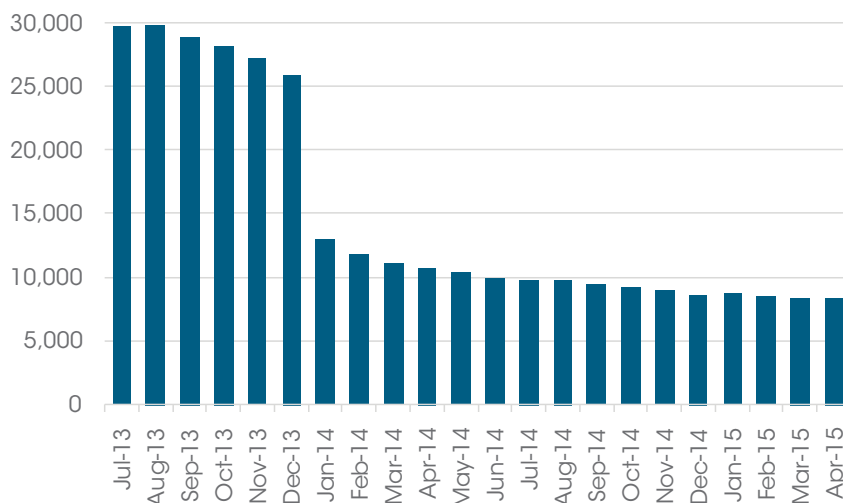
## CASE STUDY: KANSAS RESTORES WORK REQUIREMENT, SEES MASSIVE ENROLLMENT DROP

A similar pattern played out in Kansas, which restored federal work requirements in October 2013. Childless adults receiving food stamps who refused to work were cycled off the program beginning in January 2014, after reaching the three-month time limit.

The number of able-bodied childless adults receiving in food stamps in 2013 had been relatively stable, hovering between 25,000 and 30,000 enrollees each month.<sup>60</sup> In January 2014, enrollment dropped to just 13,000 able-bodied childless adults.<sup>61</sup> Enrollment has continued to decline since then, with just 8,337 able-bodied childless adults enrolled in April 2015.<sup>62</sup>

## Food stamp enrollment plummeted after Kansas restored federal work requirements

Monthly able-bodied childless adult SNAP enrollment in Kansas



Source: Kansas Department for Children and Families



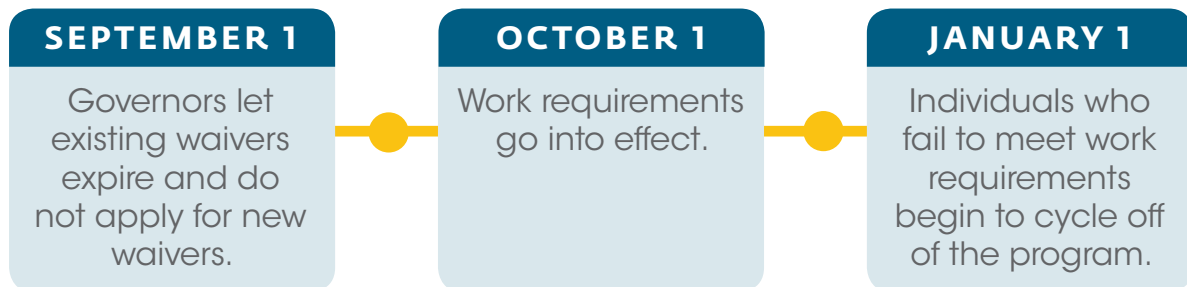
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## GOVERNORS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESTORE WORK REQUIREMENTS

Most states' work requirement waivers are scheduled to expire at the end of September 2015. Although the Obama administration appears poised to extend these waivers for another year, governors have the opportunity to help free millions of Americans from government dependency simply by refusing to go along with Obama's plan.

### T I M E L I N E :



Based on the experiences of Kansas and Maine, states that eliminate work waivers can expect a steep and immediate decline in able-bodied childless adult enrollment, lifting more Americans out of dependency and toward self-sufficiency. If all states had restored federal work requirements in 2013, between three and four million fewer childless adults would have been dependent on food stamps. This would have saved taxpayers between \$6 billion and \$8 billion annually.



## PROJECTED DECLINE IN FOOD STAMP ENROLLMENT FROM RESTORING WORK REQUIREMENTS

	FY 2013 ENROLLMENT	PROJECTED DECLINE
Alabama	94,000	56,400 - 75,200
Alaska	10,000	6,000 - 8,000
Arizona	92,000	55,200 - 73,600
Arkansas	51,000	30,600 - 40,800
California	491,000	294,600 - 392,800
Colorado**	32,000	19,200 - 25,600
Connecticut	51,000	30,600 - 40,800
Delaware*	15,000	N/A
District of Columbia	23,000	13,800 - 18,400
Florida	523,000	313,800 - 418,400
Georgia	200,000	120,000 - 160,000
Hawaii	19,000	11,400 - 15,200
Idaho	20,000	12,000 - 16,000
Illinois	239,000	143,400 - 191,200
Indiana	75,000	45,000 - 60,000
Iowa	49,000	29,400 - 39,200
Kansas	33,000	19,800 - 26,400
Kentucky	106,000	63,600 - 84,800
Louisiana	89,000	53,400 - 71,200
Maine	24,000	14,400 - 19,200
Maryland	99,000	59,400 - 79,200
Massachusetts	91,000	54,600 - 72,800
Michigan	230,000	138,000 - 184,000
Minnesota	55,000	33,000 - 44,000
Mississippi	75,000	45,000 - 60,000
Missouri	97,000	58,200 - 77,600
Montana	14,000	8,400 - 11,200
Nebraska**	9,000	5,400 - 7,200
Nevada	36,000	21,600 - 28,800
New Hampshire*	6,000	N/A
New Jersey	60,000	36,000 - 48,000
New Mexico	41,000	24,600 - 32,800
New York**	285,000	171,000 - 228,000
North Carolina	210,000	126,000 - 168,000
North Dakota**	3,000	1,800 - 2,400
Ohio	177,000	106,200 - 141,600
Oklahoma	64,000	38,400 - 51,200
Oregon	142,000	85,200 - 113,600
Pennsylvania	162,000	97,200 - 129,600
Rhode Island	18,000	10,800 - 14,400
South Carolina	101,000	60,600 - 80,800
South Dakota**	8,000	4,800 - 6,400
Tennessee	162,000	97,200 - 129,600
Texas**	125,000	75,000 - 100,000
Utah*	19,000	N/A
Vermont*	10,000	N/A
Virginia	103,000	61,800 - 82,400
Washington	163,000	97,800 - 130,400
West Virginia	34,000	20,400 - 27,200
Wisconsin	98,000	58,800 - 78,400
Wyoming*	2,000	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,935,000</b>	<b>2,929,800 - 3,906,400</b>

\* Delaware, New Hampshire, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming did not have a waiver in fiscal year 2013.

\*\* Results may slightly overstate magnitude of enrollment decline in Colorado, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Texas as these states had partial waivers in fiscal year 2013.



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## CONCLUSION

The Obama administration has awarded an unprecedented number of work requirement waivers to states, allowing able-bodied childless adults to receive taxpayer-funded food stamp benefits without working at all. Governors have the opportunity to restore the working class, spur economic growth, and reduce government dependency by taking a work-first approach to food stamps.

Reinstating work requirements for able-bodied childless adults receiving food stamps has proven profoundly successful in decreasing food stamp enrollment, returning more people to work, and even increasing charitable volunteerism.

The way forward for states could not be more simple or clear. Governors should decline to renew the federal waivers that have eliminated work requirements for able-bodied childless adults on food stamps. Doing so would reduce food stamp welfare enrollment, save federal taxpayer dollars, lift more people out of poverty, increase self-sufficiency, and spur economic growth.

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60. Authors' calculations based upon enrollment data provided by the Kansas Department for Children and Families.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.

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