

JANUARY 10, 2023



Food Stamp Boosts Are Bankrupting Taxpayers

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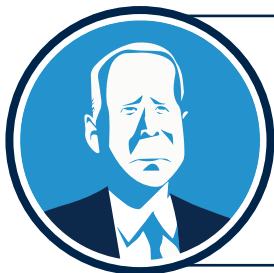
KEY FINDINGS



FOOD STAMP BENEFITS HAVE **INCREASED**
BY MORE THAN 100 PERCENT SINCE 2020.



EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS ARE **KEEPING**
FOOD STAMP PAYMENTS ELEVATED.



BIDEN'S LEGALLY QUESTIONABLE \$95
FOOD STAMP BOOST TO THE EMERGENCY
ALLOTMENTS DROVE UP COSTS BY NEARLY
\$1 BILLION PER MONTH.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

**POLICYMAKERS MUST ACT TO PROMOTE
WORK AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY.**

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a massive enrollment explosion in the food stamp program. In February 2020—just before the pandemic began—roughly 36.9 million Americans were receiving food stamps.¹ But as of September 2022, approximately 41.7 million Americans were receiving food stamps, **an increase of 4.8 million.**²

MASSIVE ENROLLMENT EXPLOSION IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Number of Americans receiving food stamps before and after the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: Food and Nutrition Service

However, this steep enrollment hike did not fall out of the sky. Pandemic-related federal and state policy changes are directly responsible for this dramatic increase in food stamps. These include the nationwide suspension of the food stamp work requirement for able-bodied adults without dependents, the Biden administration's 25 percent increase in food stamps, and an additional 12.5 percent food stamp benefit increase, among other policy changes.³⁻⁵

An equally harmful policy is the so-called food stamp "emergency allotments." These emergency allotments were created in response to the pandemic to increase the amount of food stamp benefits so that everyone on food stamps would receive the maximum benefit for their household's size, regardless of their income.⁶ States may receive and distribute these emergency allotments for as long as the national public health emergency remains in effect.⁷

In April 2021, President Biden expanded these emergency allotments even further through executive guidance.⁸ The Biden administration boosted food stamps by an additional \$95 per month for households already receiving the maximum food stamp benefit.⁹

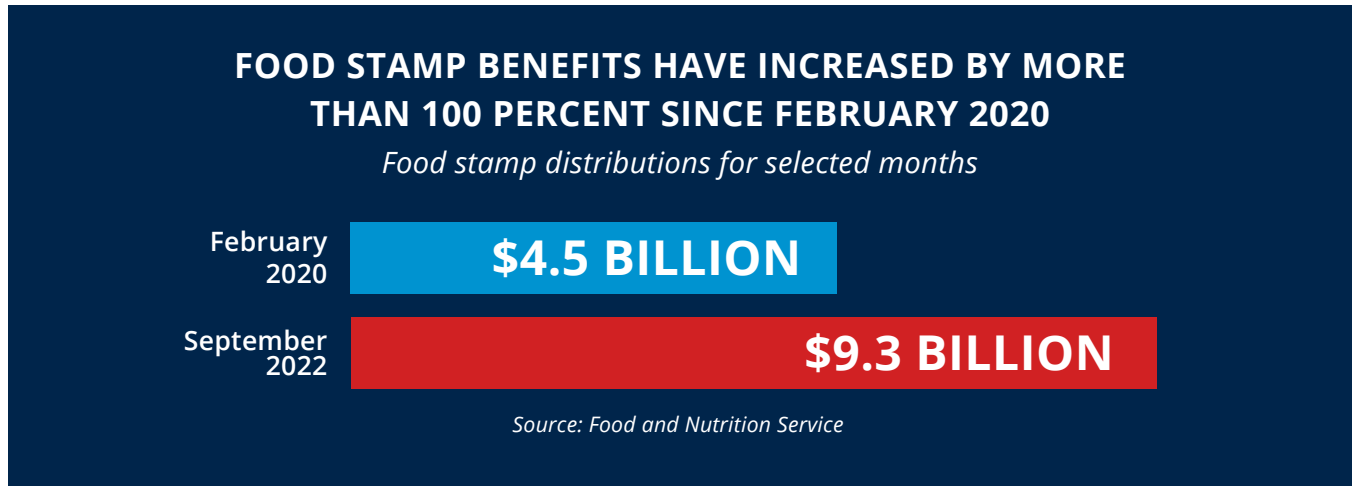
As a result of the emergency allotments, food stamp benefits are through the roof—costing taxpayers tens of billions of dollars while stifling the American workforce.



THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION BOOSTED FOOD STAMPS BY AN ADDITIONAL \$95 PER MONTH FOR HOUSEHOLDS ALREADY RECEIVING THE MAXIMUM FOOD STAMP BENEFIT.

Food Stamp Benefits Have Increased by More Than 100 Percent Since February 2020

In February 2020, roughly \$4.5 billion in food stamp benefits were paid out nationwide.¹⁰ However, by September 2022, this figure was more than \$9.3 billion, **an increase of more than 100 percent**.¹¹



All told, since the start of the pandemic, taxpayers have been on the hook for more than \$265 billion in food stamp benefits.¹² In fact, the average food stamp benefit for an individual has increased from \$121.13 to \$224.10, **an increase of more than \$100 per month**.¹³

Emergency Allotments Are Keeping Food Stamp Payments Elevated

Of the \$265+ billion in food stamp spending since the start of the pandemic, **roughly one-third of this amount—or more than \$90 billion—is directly attributable to the emergency allotments**.¹⁴

At the beginning of the pandemic, these emergency allotments were costing approximately \$2 billion per month.¹⁵ But today, even with 18 states having ended their participation in emergency allotments, it is still costing taxpayers about \$2.9 billion per month.¹⁶ This suggests that the massive hike in food stamp benefits—including the \$100 average benefit size spike—has been concentrated in the 32 states continuing to pay out emergency allotments.

In fact, from FY2019 to FY2023, a single adult living in a state continuing to pay emergency allotments saw a \$184 increase in their maximum monthly food stamp benefit.¹⁷ **A family of four in a state continuing to pay out emergency allotments can now receive more than \$1,000 per month in food stamps**.¹⁸

Emergency allotment benefit amounts have continued to creep even higher as a direct result of the Biden administration's \$95 per household per month expansion.

Biden's Legally Questionable \$95 Food Stamp Boost to the Emergency Allotments Drove Up Costs by Nearly \$1 Billion Per Month

The April 2021 emergency allotment boost from the Biden administration is only keeping these costs through the roof. For example, in March 2021, the total emergency allotment amount was roughly \$2.6 billion.¹⁹ But by May 2021, this had skyrocketed to approximately \$3.4 billion—a roughly 30 percent jump in just two months.²⁰ The key difference was what occurred between those months: the Biden administration's new "guidance" allowing an extra \$95 per household per month.²¹

Unfortunately, the process by which this extra food stamp boost was pushed through is equally as concerning as the outcome of the policy change. Instead of promulgating a rule, the Biden administration used guidance to bypass public engagement and implement a change that cost nearly \$1 billion in just one month.²² This costly executive overreach underscores the need for greater regulatory oversight by Congress.

The Biden administration's guidance should be subject to the Congressional Review Act, which is an oversight tool that gives Congress the ability to step in and disapprove it.²³ To strengthen oversight on the actions of the executive branch, Congress should pass the Regulations from the Executive in Need of Scrutiny (REINS) Act, which would require congressional approval of a regulation that costs more than \$100 million before an agency can move forward to implement it.²⁴ By strengthening congressional oversight, the additional food stamp boost—that cost nearly \$1 billion in just one month—would be subject to greater scrutiny and possibly not approved by Congress to move forward.



TO STRENGTHEN OVERSIGHT ON THE ACTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH, CONGRESS SHOULD PASS THE REINS ACT.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Policymakers Must Act to Promote Work and Ensure Accountability

Even though the emergency allotments are now scheduled to expire at the beginning of March 2023 as a result of the December 2022 omnibus legislation, benefits will still remain highly elevated due to the numerous expansions of the program under the Biden administration. States can take preemptive actions to get their food stamp programs back under control by rescinding any waivers for work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), so that these work-able individuals will re-enter the workforce when the public health emergency expires. States can also take steps to assign able-bodied adults to their food stamp Employment & Training Programs in order to reach even more enrollees and bolster their workforce.

Congress should also resist any further attempts by the Biden administration to expand food stamp benefits by legislation and should hold the administration accountable for legally questionable expansions of the program by executive action.

In order to supercharge congressional accountability, Congress must pass the REINS Act to ensure further major executive actions are not permitted without legislative scrutiny. Without the REINS Act, America is only one crisis away from another major expansion of welfare.

APPENDIX 1: EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS BY STATE AND TERRITORY, MARCH 2020–DECEMBER 2022

State/Territory	Cumulative Cost	State/Territory	Cumulative Cost
Alabama	\$1,870,803,298	Montana	\$97,423,326
Alaska	\$238,701,810	Nebraska	\$102,423,353
Arizona	\$1,307,135,042	Nevada	\$1,136,787,528
Arkansas	\$389,043,123	New Hampshire	\$198,019,095
California	\$12,757,463,942	New Jersey	\$2,134,800,000
Colorado	\$1,356,400,000	New Mexico	\$1,152,687,067
Connecticut	\$926,806,602	New York	\$6,255,111,407
Delaware	\$318,548,265	North Carolina	\$3,979,314,534
District of Columbia	\$366,658,000	North Dakota	\$37,748,108
Florida	\$3,316,831,694	Ohio	\$3,497,332,302
Georgia	\$2,553,145,626	Oklahoma	\$1,404,955,835
Guam	\$75,253,694	Oregon	\$1,768,638,089
Hawaii	\$605,185,601	Pennsylvania	\$4,874,160,511
Idaho	\$103,941,297	Rhode Island	\$354,646,992
Illinois	\$4,413,547,753	South Carolina	\$1,548,316,057
Indiana	\$927,622,600	South Dakota	\$64,755,483
Iowa	\$544,571,835	Tennessee	\$1,227,251,648
Kansas	\$450,575,970	Texas	\$7,224,529,962
Kentucky	\$1,077,247,474	Utah	\$414,199,344
Louisiana	\$1,980,182,248	Vermont	\$170,295,030
Maine	\$477,100,389	Virginia	\$2,081,845,434
Maryland	\$1,990,148,694	Virgin Islands	\$60,757,149
Massachusetts	\$2,431,972,183	Washington	\$2,464,824,820
Michigan	\$3,282,644,073	West Virginia	\$894,644,032
Minnesota	\$1,355,866,022	Wisconsin	\$2,031,484,077
Mississippi	\$740,250,000	Wyoming	\$51,532,357
Missouri	\$764,505,382	TOTAL	\$91,850,636,157

Source: Food and Nutrition Service

APPENDIX 2: STATES CONTINUING EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS AS OF DECEMBER 2022

State/Territory	Status
Alabama	Continuing
Alaska	ENDED
Arizona	ENDED
Arkansas	ENDED
California	Continuing
Colorado	Continuing
Connecticut	Continuing
Delaware	Continuing
District of Columbia	Continuing
Florida	ENDED
Georgia	ENDED
Guam	Continuing
Hawaii	Continuing
Idaho	ENDED
Illinois	Continuing
Indiana	ENDED
Iowa	ENDED
Kansas	Continuing
Kentucky	ENDED
Louisiana	Continuing
Maine	Continuing
Maryland	Continuing
Massachusetts	Continuing
Michigan	Continuing
Minnesota	Continuing
Mississippi	ENDED
Missouri	ENDED

State/Territory	Status
Montana	ENDED
Nebraska	ENDED
Nevada	ENDED
New Hampshire	Continuing
New Jersey	Continuing
New Mexico	Continuing
New York	Continuing
North Carolina	Continuing
North Dakota	ENDED
Ohio	Continuing
Oklahoma	Continuing
Oregon	Continuing
Pennsylvania	Continuing
Rhode Island	Continuing
South Carolina	Continuing
South Dakota	ENDED
Tennessee	ENDED
Texas	Continuing
Utah	Continuing
Vermont	Continuing
Virginia	Continuing
Virgin Islands	Continuing
Washington	Continuing
West Virginia	Continuing
Wisconsin	Continuing
Wyoming	ENDED

Source: Food and Nutrition Service

REFERENCES

1. Food and Nutrition Service, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: FY19 – current month," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/34SNAPmonthly-12.pdf>.
2. Ibid.
3. Alli Fick and Scott Centorino, "Missing tool: How work requirements can reduce dependency and help find absent workers," Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/paper/one-tool-unleash-economic-recovery-solve-labor-crisis/>.
4. Stewart Whitson, "Biden's food stamp increase is harmful, misguided, and illegal," Townhall (2021), <https://townhall.com/columnists/stewartwhitson/2021/09/09/bidens-food-stamp-increase-is-harmful-misguided-and-illegal-n2595535>.
5. Vance Cariaga, "Food stamps: COLA update increases SNAP EBT benefits by 12.5% starting Oct. 1," Yahoo (2022), <https://www.yahoo.com/video/food-stamps-cola-increases-snap-150415571.html>.
6. H.R. 6201 of 2020. See, e.g., <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6201/text>.
7. Jessica Shahin, "March 2020 emergency allotments memorandum," Food and Nutrition Service (2020), <https://fns.prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-COVID-EmergencyAllotmentsGuidance.pdf>.
8. Food and Nutrition Service, "April 2021 emergency allotment update," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2021), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-covid-emergency-allotments-phase-3.guidance.pdf>.
9. Ibid.
10. Food and Nutrition Service, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: FY19 – current month," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/34SNAPmonthly.11.pdf>.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Author's calculations based on cumulative emergency allotment distributions from March 2020 through November 2022. Note there is a lag between emergency allotment expense reporting (as of November 2022) and total food stamp spending (as of August 2022), which could slightly overstate the proportion of overall food stamp spending attributable to emergency allotments. Nevertheless, this is likely a minor discrepancy. See, e.g., Food and Nutrition Service, "SNAP COVID-19 emergency allotments guidance," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/covid-19-emergency-allotments-guidance>.
15. Author's calculations based on emergency allotment distributions. See, e.g., Food and Nutrition Service, "SNAP COVID-19 emergency allotments guidance," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/covid-19-emergency-allotments-guidance>.
16. Ibid.
17. A single adult could receive a maximum allotment of \$192 per month in FY2019 and \$281 per month in FY2023, an increase of \$89. The additional \$95 allotment boost would increase this to \$376 per month, a 96 percent hike over 2019 levels. See, e.g., Food and Nutrition Service, "Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) information," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/allotment/COLA>.
18. A family of four could receive a maximum allotment of \$939 per month, plus the additional \$95 boost which would increase the total to \$1,034 per month. See, e.g., Food and Nutrition Service, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 maximum allotments and deductions," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/FY23-Maximum-Allotments.Deductions.pdf>.
19. Author's calculations based on emergency allotment distributions. See, e.g., Food and Nutrition Service, "SNAP COVID-19 emergency allotments guidance," U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/covid-19-emergency-allotments-guidance>.
20. Ibid.
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22. Ibid.
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24. Alli Fick et al, "Congress Must Rein in President Biden's Regulatory Spending Spree to Tame Inflation," Foundation for Government Accountability (2022), <https://thefga.org/research/congress-must-rein-spending-to-tame-inflation/>.



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