



Ending Hunger for People Exiting Prison

June 22nd, 2023 | 1:00 PM



TENNESSEE
JUSTICE
CENTER



TJC and the Nutrition Team

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TJC Anti-Hunger Advocacy

Our mission: End hunger in Tennessee by protecting and strengthening the federal nutrition programs: SNAP, WIC, Child Nutrition Programs

- Improve access and remove barriers to programs
- Advocate for solutions to systemic issues
- Educate and inform
- Provide policy expertise
- Direct client work



Federal Nutrition Programs

SNAP Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

WIC Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infant and Children

NSLP National School Lunch Program

SBP School Breakfast Program

SFSP Summer Food Service Program

CACFP Child and Adult Care Food Program

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children:



Reduces Food Insecurity



Improves Dietary Intake and Health



Protects Against Obesity



Boosts Learning and Development



Supports Economic Security



Lifts Families out of Poverty



Acts as Stimulus for Local Economies

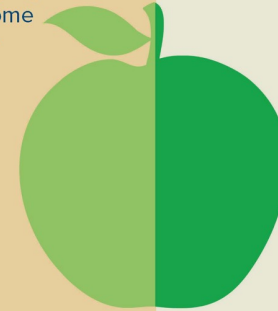
SNAP STRENGTHS

SNAP REDUCES HUNGER

and food insecurity by providing low-income people necessary food money.

SNAP IMPROVES DIETARY INTAKE

and health, especially among children and with lasting effects.



SNAP BOLSTERS LOCAL ECONOMIES

by increasing money spent for food at local retailers.

SNAP LIFTS MILLIONS OF PEOPLE out of poverty.



Agenda

- **Background & Data**
- **Federal Programs**
- **Speakers**
- **Legislation**
- **How To Help**

Re-Entry Data



- **46% Tennessee recidivism rate (2021)** [Source](#)
- **14,000 people** released from Tennessee prisons **yearly**
- Nationally, **10-20%** of people released from prison were homeless before incarceration
 - Previously incarcerated people experience **40% reduction in wages** [Source](#)
- Tennessee = highest incarceration rate **worldwide** [Source](#)
 - **838 of every 100,000 Tennesseans**

Why We Care

- **Everyone Deserves Food**
- **Families of incarcerated individuals** face program access barriers, even after re-entry
- Previously incarcerated Tennesseans are **less income secure**
- High rates of incarceration and recidivism negatively impacts the community



Hunger & Re-Entry Issues

- Trouble finding and maintaining employment due to stigma
- Families suffer during and after incarceration
 - Lost income, kinship connections, social networks
- Barriers to student financial aid and professional certifications can impede income and development
- BIPOC and LEP people are disparately affected



Effects of Hunger on Re-Entry

- Hunger raises rates of recidivism & incarceration increases food insecurity

[Source](#)

- Children of incarcerated parents have higher rates of poverty, mental illness, and truancy issues due to income

reductions [Source](#)



SNAP (Food Stamps)

SNAP is a great tool for keeping families fed!

Time Limit Policy

- Having a record makes it difficult to meet work requirements

Legal Barriers

- Drug felony ban



SNAP (Food Stamps)

Pre-release Waiver

- State option – TN waiver expires in 2025
- Allows individual to apply before release date
Benefits not issued until after release



Other waiver opportunities for TN:

- Videoconference or on-demand interviews, remove early denial, and eligibility reinstatement would all help re-entry

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families



TANF (Families First in TN)

- Provides cash benefits for families in need
- TN ban for people with Class A drug felonies
- For other convictions, individual can access TANF, but must show proof of recovery or rehab program

Women, Infants, and Children

WIC

- No restriction to WIC based on past convictions
- Support food security for families “outside” during and after incarceration



TJC

Holly Plackemeier (she/her)

Nutrition Team Intern

East Tennessee State University

Masters of Public Health, Community

Health (May 2024)



Re-entry & employment

- Employment crucial; work requirement for maintaining food assistance
- Little to no work experience upon re-entry
- Hold low-pay, insecure jobs and experience frequent periods of unemployment
- Employers reluctant to hire formerly incarcerated individuals
- Miss out on work experience and network building while incarcerated
- Some automatically banned from driving; employment harder to secure

Source: [Bread for the World](#); [Prison Policy Initiative](#); [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)

Re-entry & families

- Prisons often remove breadwinners from the household
- Many returning citizens banned from public housing -> separates families & increases likelihood of homelessness
- TN Family Support Networks:
 - [Free Hearts](#): support groups, advocacy, education
 - [Family Reconciliation Center](#): guest rooms for visitation
 - [Prison Families Alliance](#): adult & youth support

Source: [Bread for the World](#)

TJC

Anna Luttrell (she/her)

Nutrition Client Advocate

SNAP Caseworker for

Tennessee Justice Center



Partial SNAP Ban

Tennessee one of only a few states to [maintain bans](#) to SNAP for people convicted of drug-related felonies.

- Class A charges: fully banned
- Class B-E charges: banned unless they can *prove...*
 - Attended, are attending, or on a waitlist for DHS-approved substance abuse treatment
 - OR physician signs off that they don't need treatment



Applicants' Rights

Although Tennessee has a "partial" ban, many eligible people face barriers

- HH composition can be rearranged so that children and other family members can still receive benefits (especially with class E cases)
- *Applicants have the right to attest* that they completed treatment if they and their caseworker cannot get proof (many people have very old charges)
- State policy and federal regulations to back this up



Partner Update

Jody Kahn

Re-Entry Specialist/CC3

Riverbend Maximum Security Prison

TN Department of Corrections



LEGISLATION

Legislation – Farm Bill 2023

RESTORE Act ([H.R.3479](#))

- Removes Drug Felony Ban
- SNAP applications 30 days before release
- [Rep. Steve Cohen](#) of Tennessee
- Bicameral bill with Sens. Cory Booker and Raphael Warnock



Legislation – Farm Bill 2023

“SNAP Plus Act” [H.R. 6338](#)

- Would allow SNAP to be spent on hot, prepared foods
- The ability to cook or store food can often be a barrier to accessing SNAP
- [Rep. Grace Meng](#)



Legislation – Farm Bill 2023

The Improving Access to Nutrition Act ([H.R.1510](#))

- Would remove time limits for accessing SNAP
- Would benefit everyone, not just people leaving prison
- [Rep. Barbara Lee](#)



ADVOCACY/ACTION
OPPORTUNITIES

Legislation

How to help:

- [Contact your legislators](#) and urge them to adopt these bills
- House Agriculture Committee members from TN overseeing the Farm Bill. Rep. [Scott DesJarlais \(TN-04\)](#) and [Rep. John Rose \(TN-06\)](#).
- Senators [Blackburn](#) and [Hagerty](#)



Other Ways to Help

- **Sharing Information** with your clients and the community
- **Be in the know - resources available!**
- **Contact TJC!**
 - Call us with questions
 - For clients: call 615-255-0331 or fill out our [intake form](#)
 - Refer cases to us

Information & Resources

- [TJC: Nutrition Legislative Action Page](#)
- [Bread.org: Hunger and Mass Incarceration](#)
- [NIH: Food Insecurity and Incarceration](#)
- [Prison Policy: Tennessee Profile](#)
- [TN.gov: TANF Drug Felony Language](#)
- [TJC: Vaccine Resources](#)
- [CBPP: How SNAP Can Better Serve the Formerly Incarcerated](#)
- [Florida Policy Institute: Pre-Release Waiver Article](#)
- [TN Office of Re-entry](#)
- [Tennessee Higher Education Initiative](#)
- [Persevere](#)
- [Project Return](#)
- [Dismas House](#)

QUESTIONS?

Tennessee Justice Center

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