



Date: May 15, 2025

To: Committee on Public Benefit Reform

From: Amanda Martinez, Senior Policy Analyst; William Parke-Sutherland, Government Affairs Director; Alia Stevenson, Deputy Director

**RE: Opposition to Assembly Bill 180/Senate Bill 154**

Kids Forward strongly opposes AB180/SB154, which seek to restrict the use of SNAP benefits. These proposed restrictions that target recipients of SNAP are harmful and misguided, and do not address systemic barriers, instead it takes away freedom of food choice from families.

According to a USDA study,<sup>1</sup> families using SNAP benefits are no more or less likely to buy candy/soft drinks than families who aren't using SNAP. Banning certain foods likely won't change consumption, but it will increase the administrative cost. All foods can be part of a healthy diet when consumed in moderation and in appropriate portion sizes, as a result no specific food should be banned to purchase by SNAP recipients.

Limiting what people can buy with SNAP creates a dangerous precedent. Restrictions could reinforce negative stereotypes about SNAP recipients and potentially create barriers to access for those who need assistance. In reality, SNAP and non-SNAP recipients spend a similar amount on the purchases of soft drinks. According to Brookings, "Among the spending observed in the USDA study, about 5 cents of each dollar went to the purchase of soft drinks. This rate is similar to non-SNAP households, which spend an average of 4 percent of their grocery dollars on soft drinks."<sup>2</sup> This sends a message of mistrust and judgment toward low-income individuals, suggesting that they are not capable of making their own choices. This kind of policing of personal behavior is unfair and stigmatizing; and undermines the program's dignity and autonomy.

Moreover, these restrictions would place a significant administrative burden and costs on retailers, many of whom already operate on tight margins. Categorizing foods as "healthy" or "unhealthy" would be complex and costly, especially with the vast number of products on the market. Restrictions like these will be difficult to implement in practice because there are no clear standards in defining goods.

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<sup>1</sup> "Foods Typically Purchased by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Households," November 2016, USDA Food & Nutrition Service, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/snap/foods-typically-purchased-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap-households>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/pros-and-cons-of-restricting-snap-purchases/>

If participating in SNAP becomes too complicated or costly, some stores—especially small, local businesses—may choose to stop accepting SNAP altogether.<sup>3</sup> That would reduce access to food for people who are already facing food insecurity, making it even harder for them to feed themselves and their families.

Food insecurity is a serious issue. Both Wisconsin's urban and rural communities are too often in food deserts where healthy food is expensive and hard to access. We should be working to expand access and reduce stigma—not create more barriers. Instead of restricting purchases, efforts should focus on addressing the underlying issue of affordability, particularly the high cost of healthy foods.

Instead of policing low-income families, Wisconsin legislators should invest in increased funds to programs that reduce food insecurity and improve health, such as SNAP and Medicaid. Please vote no on AB 180 because it will take freedom and food away from needy families and increase administrative complexity for the thousands of retailers who participate in the program. Please reach out to [wparkesutherland@kidsforward.org](mailto:wparkesutherland@kidsforward.org) with questions, follow up, or request for more information. Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/snap-cuts-are-likely-to-harm-more-than-27000-retailers-nationwide/>