

Adams Introduces Legislation Streamlining Access to Food Assistance



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Adams, Kuster, McGovern, Panetta Introduce Legislation Reducing Bureaucracy and Streamlining Access to Food Assistance

Washington, D.C. — Today, Reps. **Alma Adams (NC-12)**, **Annie Kuster (NH-02)**, **Jim McGovern (MA-02)**, and **Jimmy Panetta (CA-20)**, members of the House Nutrition & Oversight Subcommittee of the House Committee on Agriculture, introduced the *Streamlining Nutrition Assistance Paperwork Act*. This legislation would make permanent a flexibility set up by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) during the pandemic that will help reduce a layer of bureaucracy surrounding Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications.

In 2008, Congress passed legislation allowing state agencies to use telephonic signatures in place of wet signatures for SNAP applications. Instead of requiring SNAP applicants to physically appear in person to sign their paperwork, state agencies administering SNAP could instead record the applicant affirming the accuracy of their application information over the phone and preserve the recording. However, not all states take advantage of this option because of the expense of the technology required and issues implementing it — initial costs have ranged as high as \$150,000-\$900,000 depending on the agency in

question, the size of population served, and what features they want to be included in the program. It can also be cumbersome or prohibitive for teleworking employees to use from home.

Under the authority provided to them by the Families First Coronavirus bill last spring, USDA gave states the ability, if they choose, to waive the audio recording requirement in favor of state officials simply being able to note the verbal affirmation of the SNAP applicant on their paperwork, instead of a wet or recorded signature. The legislation introduced today would formally codify this flexibility beyond the pandemic, saving time, money, and administrivia, while helping remove a potential barrier between qualified SNAP applicants and efficient access to the program. [New Hampshire and many other states utilized this flexibility](#) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a study of state SNAP agencies conducted by the American Public Human Services Association found that a large majority of states support making this flexibility permanent.

“The flexibility that the temporary telephonic signature waiver provides is a lifeline for so many Americans. This flexibility has allowed states to reach more of the community and recipients to maintain much needed SNAP benefits,” **said Congresswoman Adams**. “I’m grateful for the leadership of Congresswoman Kuster for introducing the *Streamlining Nutrition Assistance Paperwork Act*, which breaks down the barriers to eligibility and strengthens the SNAP program for millions of people by improving the SNAP application process.”

“As millions of families suddenly experienced job loss or reduced hours during the COVID-19 pandemic, our country was once again reminded of the vital role SNAP plays in helping to put food on the table and avoid hunger,” **said Rep. Kuster**. “It’s now more important than ever that we reduce unnecessary or redundant bureaucracy that inhibits qualified applicants from enrolling in SNAP in a timely manner. My *Streamlining Nutrition Assistance Paperwork Act* will remove an expensive and burdensome requirement on states that does not impact the accuracy or veracity of SNAP applications. I’m proud to introduce this legislation that will improve the application process and help prevent hunger.”

“Even before COVID hit, too many people in my district and across America couldn’t afford the basic human right of access to nutritious food. Programs like SNAP are our first line of defense against hunger, but we can’t just go back to the status quo where hunger impacted tens of millions of hungry families in the richest country in the history of the world. We ought to take what we learned about combating food insecurity during the pandemic and use it to end hunger once and for all,” **said Chairman McGovern**. “Hunger is a political condition—

we have the food, the resources, and the expertise to feed everybody. What we lack is the political will to act. I'm grateful to Rep. Kuster for introducing this bill to help prevent hunger by improving the SNAP application process."

"As we saw first-hand on the Central Coast, the COVID-19 pandemic left many families hungry in many of our communities. In response to the ongoing public health emergency, we in Congress have worked hard to ensure that those who are eligible for the benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program can actually access them," **said Rep. Panetta**. "That's why we must make permanent some of the pandemic-related flexibilities for SNAP, especially as we look to modernize the program for the twenty-first century and improve participation among those eligible. I am proud to join Rep. Kuster and my colleagues in doing just that through our SNAP Act to cut through the bureaucracy and help families put food on their tables."

"Despite the tremendous work of our national food bank network, Feeding America recognizes that SNAP remains the first line of defense against hunger in the U.S.," **said Robert Campbell, Managing Director of Policy, Feeding America**. "Through the pandemic's hardships, the USDA and our network have recognized several SNAP program flexibilities that should be made permanent—especially those like telephonic signatures that increase access and streamline program administration. The Streamlining Nutrition Assistance Paperwork Act helps more families have the food they need to be healthy and successful."

"SNAP remains a vital lifeline for millions of Americans facing food insecurity, and many of the flexibilities implemented at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic proved critical to ensuring that anyone in need could keep food on the table," **said Josh Protas, Vice President of Public Policy for [MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger](#)**. "We are grateful to Congresswoman Kuster for introducing the *Streamlining Nutrition Assistance Paperwork Act*, which will help streamline access to SNAP by waiving onerous requirements that were burdensome for both states and those in need of assistance. Now, more than ever, we must all work together to ensure that there are as few barriers as possible to accessing nutrition assistance."

"The Streamlining Nutrition Assistance Paperwork Act is a meaningful first step towards addressing eligibility disproportionality and inequities in federal programs by extending the telephonic signature waiver to all states," **said Mecklenburg County's Director of Social Services John Eller**. "Mecklenburg County, North Carolina's 165,289 Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients have experienced firsthand the positive impact

temporary waivers have had during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing waiver flexibility for SNAP as well as Medicaid and TANF play a crucial role in alleviating barriers for eligible recipients in our community including transportation for face-to-face activities, allowing applications and renewals to be completed virtually and reducing administrative burden.”

Also joining in introducing this legislation are Representatives **Lisa Blunt Rochester (DE-AL), Ed Case (HI-01), Anna Eshoo (CA-18), Jared Huffman (CA-02), Sara Jacobs (CA-53), Marie Newman (IL-03), Chris Pappas (NH-01), Adam Smith (WA-09), Marilyn Strickland (WA-10), and Lori Trahan (MA-03).**

Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, Ph.D. represents North Carolina’s 12th Congressional District (Charlotte, Mecklenburg County) and serves as Vice Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture. Additionally, she serves on the House Financial Services Committee and the House Education & Labor Committee, where she serves as Chair of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee. In 2015, she founded the Adams Hunger Initiative to address food insecurity in the 12th District and the greater Charlotte region.

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