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Texas Food Banks Ask Legislators to Implement Pre-Release SNAP Registration

This simple policy change would fight hunger and reduce recidivism for formerly incarcerated Texans.

TEXAS – The Feeding Texas network, made up of 21 food banks across the state, is calling on state legislators to support hungry Texans leaving the criminal justice system today in a virtual day of advocacy.

At any given time, nearly 300,000 Texans are on parole or probation. Many of these Texans struggle to reintegrate back into society, and a large percentage are rearrested or reincarcerated within a few years of release.

“Texans leaving the criminal justice system reenter their communities with a set of complex needs and challenges, including food insecurity, unstable housing, and impediments to finding and retaining quality employment,” **said Celia Cole, CEO of Feeding Texas.** “Early access to SNAP benefits ensures formerly incarcerated Texans have immediate resources for food so they can begin rebuilding their lives.”

Sen. Royce West and Rep. Jeff Leach filed companion bills in the Senate (SB 727) and House (HB 1743) that would support people exiting the criminal justice system by implementing pre-release registration for SNAP benefits. This is not an expansion of benefits, as these individuals are already eligible for SNAP and would still have to complete the normal application process.

“Ensuring access to food assistance upon release means that Texans leaving the criminal justice system can focus on finding a job and reuniting with family,” **Rep. Leach said.** “This is a simple policy change that would support the reentry process, reduce recidivism, and could help lower incarceration costs for the state.”

Research shows that people exiting the criminal justice system are especially vulnerable immediately after release. SNAP provides basic food assistance and supplements limited income for formerly incarcerated Texans who often have no means of purchasing food for themselves or their families.

Federal SNAP rules require that states process applications within 30 days of an individual filing the request. For people with zero resources for food, this is too long to wait. Moreover, recent staffing shortages at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HSSC) have pushed this processing time to over 60 days.

“For Texans leaving the criminal justice system with no means to afford groceries, delays in processing their SNAP applications can lead to hunger and undermine their reentry,” **Sen. West said.** “Texas should join several other states who have addressed this issue by allowing people who are incarcerated to apply for SNAP prior to their release.”

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Feeding Texas leads a unified effort for a hunger-free Texas. Learn more and find your local food bank at www.feedingtexas.org.