



State of Connecticut

## **GOV. MALLOY MOVES TO SAFEGUARD FOOD BENEFITS FOR 50,000 LOW-INCOME FAMILIES**

### *State Acts Swiftly to Prevent Fallout from 2014 Farm Bill Cuts*

(HARTFORD, CT) – Governor Dannel P. Malloy today announced that his administration is taking immediate action to prevent nearly 50,000 Connecticut households from losing vital food benefits through cuts in the recently-passed Farm Bill.

Nationally, an estimated 850,000 recipients of the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) are on the brink of losing a major portion of benefits if states fail to meet new standards of the law.

“Connecticut, for one, will not stand by while our low-income families and elders are put at risk by Washington politics,” Governor Malloy said. “I have directed my administration to take all necessary measures to protect Connecticut beneficiaries of the federal SNAP program from the negative consequences of the Farm Bill.”

Connecticut is moving to maintain current SNAP benefit levels for the nearly 50,000 households by opting to meet the new standards in the Farm Bill as rapidly as possible, the Governor said.

“Our decisive action means that Connecticut residents will be held harmless from the worst type of cuts at the worst possible time in one of the most critical of national safety-net programs,” Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman said.

Specifically, Connecticut is dedicating additional energy assistance dollars to meet what’s called the ‘standard utility allowance’ for eligible SNAP recipients. This will allow current SNAP recipients to keep the benefits they’re eligible for. Otherwise, the Farm Bill would slash an estimated average of \$112 from monthly benefits in Connecticut.

“The Governor’s directive to expend \$1.4 million in available federal energy assistance funding will preserve approximately \$66.6 million annually in SNAP benefits for households in Connecticut,” said Office of Policy and Management Secretary Ben Barnes.

President Obama signed the 2014 Farm Bill into law on February 7, 2014. All five Members of Connecticut's House delegation along with Senators Blumenthal and Murphy opposed the cuts in funding and voted against the bill. The compromise legislation increases the amount of the direct cash benefit required under the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to \$20.01 per household in order to be eligible for the standard utility allowance.

“Cuts to SNAP denying struggling families, young children, and seniors access to healthy meals is unconscionable, and that is one of the key reasons why I voted against the Farm Bill,” said U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal. “I applaud the governor for doing all he can at the state level to address the federal government’s failure to keep faith with those in need.”

“I didn't vote for the Farm Bill because it disproportionately cut food stamps compared to the cuts in the bill to wasteful subsidies to agri-business,” said U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy. “This program has already suffered massive cuts from Washington, and with too many

family budgets in Connecticut already stretched to the breaking point, there's no reason to make their situation worse. I applaud the governor for moving to protect people in Connecticut whose wallets are stretched to the limits with this law."

"I applaud Governor Malloy for fighting to help those who need it most. While Washington has either cut, stood still or obstructed, he continues to move forward on behalf of working families. The farm bill stood to deny services to families in need across Connecticut, asking them to choose between food on the table or heat for their homes. That's why I joined the delegation in opposing these cuts and am pleased to see Connecticut protecting these crucial benefits," said U.S. Rep. John B. Larson.

"I applaud the Governor's quick response to ensure that Connecticut families are not harmed by the Farm Bill's cuts to food and energy assistance programs," said U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney. "Throughout the Farm Bill process we worked hand in hand with the state to create a strategy that would protect low-income families from these cuts and I am pleased that those efforts have been realized today. However, it is unfortunate that resources for energy assistance have to be expended in this fashion. Instead of using LIHEAP funds specifically to help families heat their homes, cuts in the Farm Bill are forcing our state to use some of these resources to patch our social safety net."

"The Farm Bill's cuts in food assistance, which I voted against, disproportionately hurt our neighbors who are struggling in this cold winter to put food on the table and keep their homes warm," said U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Esty. "I applaud Governor Malloy for taking action to protect this critical safety-net for families and their children in Connecticut."

Although the legislation allows states the option to delay implementation for current recipients by five months from the date of enactment, Governor Malloy has directed the Department of Social Services (DSS) to implement this change for all households by March 15, 2014. At an estimated cost of \$1.4 million, LIHEAP funds are available under the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program to increase the standard utility allowance benefit from \$1 to \$20.01 this year for these households. (Connecticut's final LIHEAP allocation is higher than the amount assumed in the allocation plan, resulting in the availability of funds.)

"This will help ensure that current beneficiaries eligible for this portion of the SNAP benefit – nearly 50,000 of the total enrollment of 227,000 in Connecticut -- are not negatively impacted and new enrollees are able to receive a higher amount of federal SNAP benefits," said DSS Commissioner Roderick L. Bremby.

Governor Malloy said, "I certainly understand the nature and constraints of the federal legislative process. Fortunately, a mechanism remained in the Farm Bill, as signed by the President, to keep SNAP benefits calculated through the standard utility allowance intact for the households who depend on them to put food on the table. I thank the leadership and staff in the Office of Policy and Management and Department of Social Services for the good work in making this happen for our Connecticut beneficiaries."

The Governor also commended all members of state's Congressional delegation for their "tireless work in advocating for people in Connecticut and across the nation for whom the SNAP program is an absolute lifeline."

#### Additional information on the technical aspects of the standard utility allowance:

Currently, benefits under the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are available to SNAP recipient households: (1) whose primary source of heat is included as part of their rent; (2) who have a shelter and/or utility obligation and (3) who pay less than 30% of their gross income toward rent. Eligible households receive a direct cash benefit under LIHEAP in the amount of \$1.00. This benefit is issued by the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) to all eligible SNAP households. Receipt of a LIHEAP SNAP benefit qualifies these household to have their SNAP benefits recalculated using the maximum Heating/Cooling Standard Utility Allowance (SUA). For most households, the SUA recalculation results in increased SNAP benefits. Nearly 50,000 households will receive this benefit this year under the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP).

The current LIHEAP allocation plan includes a provision that allows an increase in LIHEAP SNAP Benefits should funds received exceed the amount required to meet the benefit levels specified in the plan. Based on this provision, the Governor has directed DSS to increase LIHEAP SNAP benefits to \$20.01 before March 15. In future years, the LIHEAP allocation plan will be revised to accommodate the higher SUA payment.

#### Additional information on the SNAP program:

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps) is a federally-funded food benefit program administered in Connecticut by the Department of Social Services. Currently, a total of about 227,000 households are enrolled in the program. The subject of this news release relates to a subsection of the total enrollment – nearly 50,000 households eligible for recalculated/increased SNAP benefits through the process in the LIHEAP/energy assistance program described above.