

Advocacy Update 12.16.2021



In Brief -

- The National Defense Authorization Act heads to President for Signature
- Public Health Emergency Declaration and All It's Tied To: Explained
- How Do You Feel About Dollar Stores?

The National Defense Authorization Act Passes House & Senate, Now to President

Anti-hunger advocates in Texas have been in strong support of a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). While it might seem strange for food policy folks to be mingling in a piece of legislations around military defense, there is a valid reason why.

Within the proposed NDAA, there lay the Military Hunger Prevention Act. This act establishes provisions to ensure no military family goes hungry. Unfortunately, many military families facing food insecurity do not qualify for SNAP. The current SNAP application process includes the Basic Allowance for Housing in its calculation of gross income, thus moving their income calculation out of range to qualify for the program. The calculation makes it appear as if military families are receiving military housing benefits as monthly income, a non-liquid asset that families never see as income. As a result, thousands of military families have been relying on food pantries to help put food on the table. Food pantries serving military installations, had reported a 400% increase in demand during the pandemic.

The House and Senate passed Act will allow the Secretary of Defense to decide, by rule making, whether the Basic Allowance for Housing will be used in the calculation of gross income. A step in the right direction to assist military families can access SNAP benefits if needed. Additionally, the Act will require the Pentagon to produce a report on the extent and the effects of food insecurity in the Military.

From Mazon:

"Earlier today, Congress passed a pared-down version of the Military Family Basic Needs Allowance in its annual Defense Authorization bill — this is a first step toward ending military hunger, but it will leave far too many military families still struggling with hunger. Today's bill passage marks the first time that both chambers of Congress have at least sought to use their legislative authority to provide systemic support for hungry military families, and while today's "compromise" bill is better than no solution, we still have much work ahead."

Public Health Emergency Declaration, Why We Care: Explained

The National Secretary of Health and Human Services, has authorization [to declare a Public Health Emergency](#). This declaration currently keeps the possibility open for Texas to continue to provide emergency allotments of SNAP to program participants due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

From USDA FNS Memo:

Approval for Emergency Allotments (EA) will continue to be granted when:

- The national public health emergency declaration that was extended on January 21, 2021, by the Secretary for Health and Human Services under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act remains in place, and
- The State-issued emergency or disaster declaration remains in place, and the State meets the conditions outlined in the EA request template that follows.

People enrolled in SNAP have been receiving their maximum benefit during the pandemic. For some families, this is hundreds of extra dollars they have been using at their local grocery retailer to purchase food for themselves and their family.

[The current national Public Health Emergency Declaration](#) expires 90 days after it was signed, meaning, this current version will expire early in January. Anti-hunger advocates are keeping a close watch on this declaration as the decision on whether to extend the emergency is up in the air and unconfirmed. With the new omicron variant on the immediate rise across the United States, vaccinations, boosters, and medical predictions, what will happen for 2022 is greatly unknown but carefully monitored. SNAP serves as the first line of defense against hunger, and any alteration to its benefit value greatly impacts food bank, food pantries, and anti-hunger organizations. Stay tuned.

Dollar Stores, Dallas' new hot topic

The Dallas City Council has [been in the news](#) recently considering whether to impose regulations on what is commonly referred to as "Dollar Stores", or as they are more officially titled, "small discount retail establishments."

The argument presented to the Dallas City Council in November centers around a few issues. First, many Dollar Stores do not carry fresh items such as produce or refrigerated meats. For low-income, low-access areas, larger grocery superstores are hard to find. So, Dollar Stores may be the closest or only source of food for households. Additionally, there are arguments that larger grocery stores may be inhibited to enter areas where there are multiple Dollar Stores present, hesitant about profitability and market share.

On the other side of the argument, many community members enjoy the low prices that Dollar Stores offer them on grocery staples, and some offer frozen fruits, vegetables, dairy, and frozen meats, which allow tight budgets to stretch further without the fear of spoilage. And some residents feel that city regulation of private business is an overreach of the government.

A few major cities have already passed ordinances and regulation of their Dollar Stores, including, Mesquite, Fort Worth, Tulsa, Kansas City, Birmingham, and New Orleans, all cities with high food insecurity rates; some set distances apart from one another, and some set regulations as to what the stores must carry, and some both. In 2019, the Fort Worth City Council, amended the city's zoning ordinance to require Dollar Stores to utilize 10% of their shelf space for fresh and healthy foods, and stores may not exist within 2 miles of one another.

So, I'm curious, what are your thoughts on this issue, I'd love to hear it! Hit Reply.

Questions or Comments?

[Keep this stream as your background to calm your December nerves](#)

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