



TO: Health & Human Services Committee
FROM: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: March 5, 2025
RE: LB319 (Eligibility for SNAP Benefits) (Support)

The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church through engaging, educating, and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public.

Adequate and nutritious food is a basic need that is integral to protecting the life and dignity of the human person. The Catholic Church and her many members, parishes, schools, and charitable agencies across the state of Nebraska is a key leader in assisting those who need access to food, in addition to other basic material needs. We do this charitable work as our response to Jesus who instructed His believers to “feed the hungry”. But the reality is that the need for food assistance goes well beyond what the Church and others can provide.

SNAP provides an important governmental program that does exactly as its names state: it supplements the food assistance needs that more local entities cannot totally fulfill with their own charitable resources. SNAP helps combat hunger across the nation by helping feed millions of people every year. In 2024, it helped 155,000 Nebraska residents (1 in every 13 Nebraskans), with 68% of participants being families with children.¹

LB319 is an important bill that ensures food access for those who have at some point in their lifetime committed certain crimes. This is a subset of the population who experiences food insecurity at much higher rates than the general population.² While justice must be served for crimes committed, there is a basic injustice in prohibiting those who have served their time from accessing basic needs, like food, when they are otherwise eligible for such assistance. Providing access to SNAP can help reduce recidivism and help increase successful re-entry and reintegration into society. Granting broader access to SNAP benefits is also an important step to self-responsibility for those who are overcoming previous drug-related convictions or addictions.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference respectfully asks that you advance LB319 to General File. Thank you for your time and consideration of our position.

¹ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, “Nebraska: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” (Jan. 21, 2025), accessible at https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_nebraska.pdf (last accessed on March 5, 2025).

² One overview of the data reveals that food insecurity among formerly incarcerated people is twice as high compared to the general population, while another study demonstrates that upwards to 90% of formerly incarcerated people report food insecurity and 37% report not having eaten for a day because they lack the funds to purchase food. See Jenny Landon, Alexi Jones, “Food insecurity is rising, and incarceration puts families at risk,” Prison Policy Initiative (February 10, 2021), accessible at <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/02/10/food-insecurity/> (last accessed on March 5, 2025).