



ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Representative Genevieve Mina

Member, House Health and Social Services Committee

Member, House Transportation Committee

Serving House District 19: Airport Heights, Mountain View, & Russian Jack

HB 196 Sponsor Statement

"An Act relating to the supplemental nutrition assistance program; and providing for an effective date."

In Alaska, too many working families and seniors are forced to choose between paying bills or putting food on the table. Food pantries are seeing unprecedented levels of demand while the cost of living increases. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the state's most effective tool to combat hunger for low-income households, feeding one in eight Alaskans. However, Alaska SNAP recipients nearing the upper income limit risk losing more in benefits than they would earn if they accepted a modest increase in income or savings, resulting in a "benefits cliff." The current system fosters dependence on the program while penalizing economic independence and financial stability.

One strategy to enhance SNAP's effectiveness and efficiency is by implementing broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) – a federal flexibility that has been adopted in 42 states and two territories. BBCE mitigates the cliff effect by modifying SNAP's income and asset requirements. First, it allows the state to increase SNAP's income limit from 130% to 200% of the Alaska poverty standard. Second, it allows the state to waive SNAP's asset test. BBCE allows states to phase down benefits for working families as their income rises. Additionally, SNAP is an economic driver for groceries and rural community, and every dollar invested in SNAP has been shown to yield \$1.70 in economic activity.

BBCE also decreases the administrative burden with the potential for cost savings for the state. Asset verifications are time-consuming and error prone. Removing the asset test reduces staff time needed to process applications. The time for this transformative change is now, and it aligns with ongoing efforts to modernize the SNAP process and address pressing challenges facing Alaskans.

Food is not merely about satisfying hunger; food is medicine. Access to nutritious food is a vital component of the social determinants of health, helping children go to school and families go to work. The implementation of BBCE for SNAP in Alaska is an urgent and necessary step towards alleviating the burden on food banks, reducing government bureaucracy, enhancing food security, and promoting self-sufficiency.

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