

# Rep. Moore, colleagues: Introduce the MEAL act

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Congresswoman Gwen Moore (WI-04), Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-09) and Congresswomen Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ-12) and Jahana Hayes (CT-05) today introduced the Making Essentials Affordable and Lawful (MEAL) Act to lift restrictions on the receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits for people with prior felony drug convictions.

“When you serve your time, the punishment shouldn’t continue after incarceration. We need to give people the opportunity to rebuild their lives after incarceration, and that starts with ensuring they have access to the resources that can keep them afloat. People of color are still forced to bear the consequences for the War on Drugs, including bars to basic needs such as food aid, and it’s time we redress this injustice and pass the MEAL Act,” said **Congresswoman Moore**.

“Thousands of people released from state and federal prisons each year re-enter society and find significant challenges, including lifetime bans on food assistance and TANF. This bill would repeal the 1996 ban on people with drug felony convictions receiving SNAP and TANF, and it would allow them to apply for these programs before their release so that they can meet their basic needs on day one, reducing the likelihood of recidivism and increasing the quality of life of those aiming to reintegrate into their communities,” said **Congressman Cohen**.

“Reentering Americans face enough hurdles upon leaving prison without also facing the threat of going hungry. As we continue to reform our criminal justice system, lifting lifetime bans on food assistance programs is an important step in both demonstrating our humanity and reducing recidivism. Maintaining such a ban on during a pandemic and economic crisis is both cruel and counterproductive,”

said **Congresswoman Watson Coleman**.

“SNAP and TANF are critical supports that would help Americans as they transition back to their communities after incarceration. Once a person has served their time, we should be ensuring they have the tools to succeed and become productive members of society. Denying access to safety net programs only puts needless obstacles in their path. I am pleased to work with Representatives Cohen, Moore, and Watson Coleman on this crucial legislation ensuring formerly incarcerated Americans have a fair chance at success and self-sufficiency,”

said **Congresswoman Hayes**.

“A drug conviction should never be the basis to deny a person their most basic needs. During this unprecedented time of COVID-19 and record unemployment, federal programs like SNAP and TANF are a lifeline for millions of Americans, ensuring they can still put food on the table and keep the lights on. Those with felony drug convictions—and especially those transitioning to society following involvement in the criminal legal system—already face significant barriers to obtaining employment and, in many cases, are the first to be let go during times like these. Having to go hungry should not be an additional barrier, especially when they have already paid such an overly severe price under the U.S.’ draconian drug laws,” said **Grant Smith, Deputy Director of the Office of National Affairs at the Drug Policy Alliance**.

*Many of the 600,000 people released from our federal prisons each year find serious challenges when they reenter their communities, including restrictions or lifetime bans on food assistance under SNAP and TANF. Most states have opted to alter or remove such bans, but lingering barriers continue to hinder returning citizens and expose them to higher risks of recidivism.*

*To fix this problem, the MEAL Act would lift SNAP and TANF restrictions for people with prior felony drug convictions. In addition, the bill would codify the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) waiver that allows prisoners to apply for SNAP and TANF up to 30 days before they are released, ensuring that they will be able to meet their basic needs as soon as they reenter society.*

*The measure has 22 original cosponsors.*

The MEAL Act is supported by the following organizations:

9to5 (GA), A Little Piece Of Light (NY), ACLU of Southern California (CA), Advocates To End Domestic Violence (NV), AIDS Alabama (AL), Alameda County Community Food Bank (CA), American Association of People with Disabilities , American Public Health Association, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), Arizona Food Bank Network (AZ), Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO, Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) (MD), Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (MD), Bmore Power (MD), Bread For the World, California Alliance for Retired Americans (CA), California Association of Food Banks (CA), Carson Valley Community Food Closet (CA), Casa-Trinity Inc.- Tioga County (NY), Center for Employment Opportunities, Center for Great Expectations (NJ), Center for Law and Justice, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research (CLEAR), Center for Popular Democracy, Center for Responsible Lending, Central Texas Harm Reduction (TX), Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy (NC), Children's Defense Fund, Church of Scientology National Affairs Office, Church World Service, Coalition on Human Needs, Color Of Change, Community Catalyst, Community Housing Partnership (CA), Compass Family Services (CA), Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants), Disability and Aging Justice Clinic (NY), Disciples Center for Public Witness, Equal Justice Society, Equal Rights Advocates, Fair and Just Prosecution, FAMM, Federation of Virginia Food Banks (VA), Feed More (VA), Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin (WI), Feeding Louisiana (LA), Feeding Wisconsin (WI), Friends Committee on National Legislation, Food Bank of Northern Nevada (NV), Food for People (CA), Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), Forward Justice (NC), Freedom Agenda, Futures Without Violence , G III Associates, LLC (DC), GLIDE (CA), Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (PA), Harvesters-The Community Food Network (KS/MO), Health in Justice Action Lab (MA), HealthRIGHT 360 (CA), Heartland Alliance , HOPE Food Pantry at Susanville United Methodist Church (CA), Housing and Community Development Network of NJ (NJ), Human Rights Watch, Hunger Action Los Angeles Inc (CA), Hunger-Free PA (PA), ICNA Council for Social Justice , Interfaith Action for Human Rights, Interfaith Food Pantry Network (NJ), Interfaith Food Pantry of the Oranges (NJ), Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Just Future Project, Justice in Aging, JustLeadershipUSA, Law Enforcement Action Partnership, Legal Action Center, LGBTQ Allyship (WA), Los Angeles LGBT Center (CA), Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry NJ (NJ), Maryland Communities United (MD), Medication Assisted Treatment Support & Awareness (MATSA) (WV), Mental Health Association of San Francisco (CA), NAMI San Francisco (CA), National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, National Association of Social Workers, National Center

for Lesbian Rights, National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development, National Coalition for the Homeless, National Conference of Black Lawyers, National Council of Churches, National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), National Health Care for the Homeless Council, National HIRE Network, National Network of Arab American Communities (NNAAC), National WIC Association, National Women's Law Center, NC Justice Center (NC), NC Reentry Innovators for Success, Inc. (NC), NC Second Chance Alliance (NC), NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies, New Georgia Project Action Fund (GA), New Life Assembly of God, Reno (NV), North Carolina Justice Center (NC), Nourish California (CA) , Operation Restoration (LA), Parent Voices CA (CA), People's Action, Positive Women's Network-USA, Prison Policy Initiative, Project Bread (MA), Quest Counseling & Consulting (NV), Reframe Health and Justice , RESULTS, Right Choice Recovery (NJ), Ron Wood Family Resource Center (NV), Rural Health Network SCNY (NY), SAARA of Virginia (VA), Safer Foundation, Saint Francis of Assisi Food Pantry (NV), San Francisco Pretrial Diversion Project (CA), San Francisco Public Defender's Office (CA), San Francisco Senior & Disability Action (CA), San Francisco-Marin Food Bank (CA), Second Harvest of Silicon Valley (CA), Social Action Linking Together (SALT) (VA), Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund, Southern Tier AIDS Program (NY), Sparks United Methodist Church Food Pantry (NV), St Francis of Assisi Food Pantry, Reno (NV), STEP2 (NV), [StoptheDrugWar.org](http://StoptheDrugWar.org), Stop Stigma Now (NY), Strollpdx (OR), Students for Sensible Drug Policy, Swords to Plowshares (CA), The Black Sex Worker Collective, The Bridge Church (NV), The Center for Community Transitions (NC), The Daniel Initiative, The DC Center for LGBTQ Community (DC), The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center (NY), The Levenson Foundation, The Sentencing Project, The WEL Foundation (NY), The Women's Building (CA), TN State Conference NAACP (TN), Transgender Law Center, Treatment Communities of America, Treatment On Demand Coalition SF (CA), Trust for America's Health, Truth Pharm Inc. (NY), Union for Reform Judaism, United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries, Urban Survivors Union, Utahns Against Hunger (UT), Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VA), Virginia Poverty Law Center (VA), Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Washington Statewide Reentry Council (WA), and Center on Law and Poverty (CA).