



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

Work and Nonwork among SNAP Recipients

(Nonelderly adults, Oct 2019-Feb 2020)

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Is SNAP the new AFDC?

Not Quite, But Close

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is now larger than TANF and, in fact, also AFDC at its peak.
 - More recipient households (22 million compared to AFDC's 4.9 million in 1994);
 - Adjusted for inflation,
 - Higher total spending (\$113 billion compared to AFDC's \$48 billion in 1994); and,
 - Higher benefit value for three-person households (about \$8,800 compared to AFDC's \$8,300 in 1996).
- SNAP eligibility determinations are much more relaxed than either TANF or AFDC;
 - and no time limit for the receipt of benefits.
- However, while SNAP benefits supplemented AFDC benefits, TANF plays a much smaller role in supplementing SNAP benefits.
 - So, on average, poor households receive less support.
- The advocates usually defend SNAP by saying that most recipients “work.”
 - Our research shows that is a misleading assertion.
- Given these comparisons, how should we think about SNAP---and its possible reform?

SNAP Work Requirements

Adults 18-59

General Work Requirements

- Register to work
- Participate in SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program (if mandated by state)
- Accept a “suitable” job, if offered
- If employed, do not voluntarily quit or reduce work effort

Exceptions

- Working 30+ hours a week
- Meeting work req of another program
- Caring for a child <6 or a disabled person
- Disabled
- Participating in a substance abuse program
- Studying in a school or training program

Additional Work Requirement for ABAWDs

For at least 80 hours a month, participate in the following (either alone or in combination):

- Work (paid or volunteer)
- Work program (such as SNAP E&T)
- Workfare

Exceptions

- Disabled
- Pregnant
- Having someone <18 in household
- Veteran
- Homeless
- In foster care on 18th birthday

Overbroad Definitions of Work among SNAP Recipients

- **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2023)**

- “Among households who reported receiving SNAP at any point during 2021 with at least one working-age (18- to 59-year-old), non-disabled adult, **86 percent had earnings during the year.**” (American Community Survey, ACS)
- “Nearly **three-quarters** of adults who participate in SNAP in a typical month [in 2015] **work** either that month or **within a year of that month of participation.**” (Survey of Income and Program Participation, SIPP)

- **But . . .**

- Both surveys **undercount many SNAP recipients** and miss many families, especially those with fewer workers;
- **Broad definition of work**, including as little as **any earnings in a 2-year period**; and
- Survey **households can include non-SNAP recipients**, which would exaggerate work.

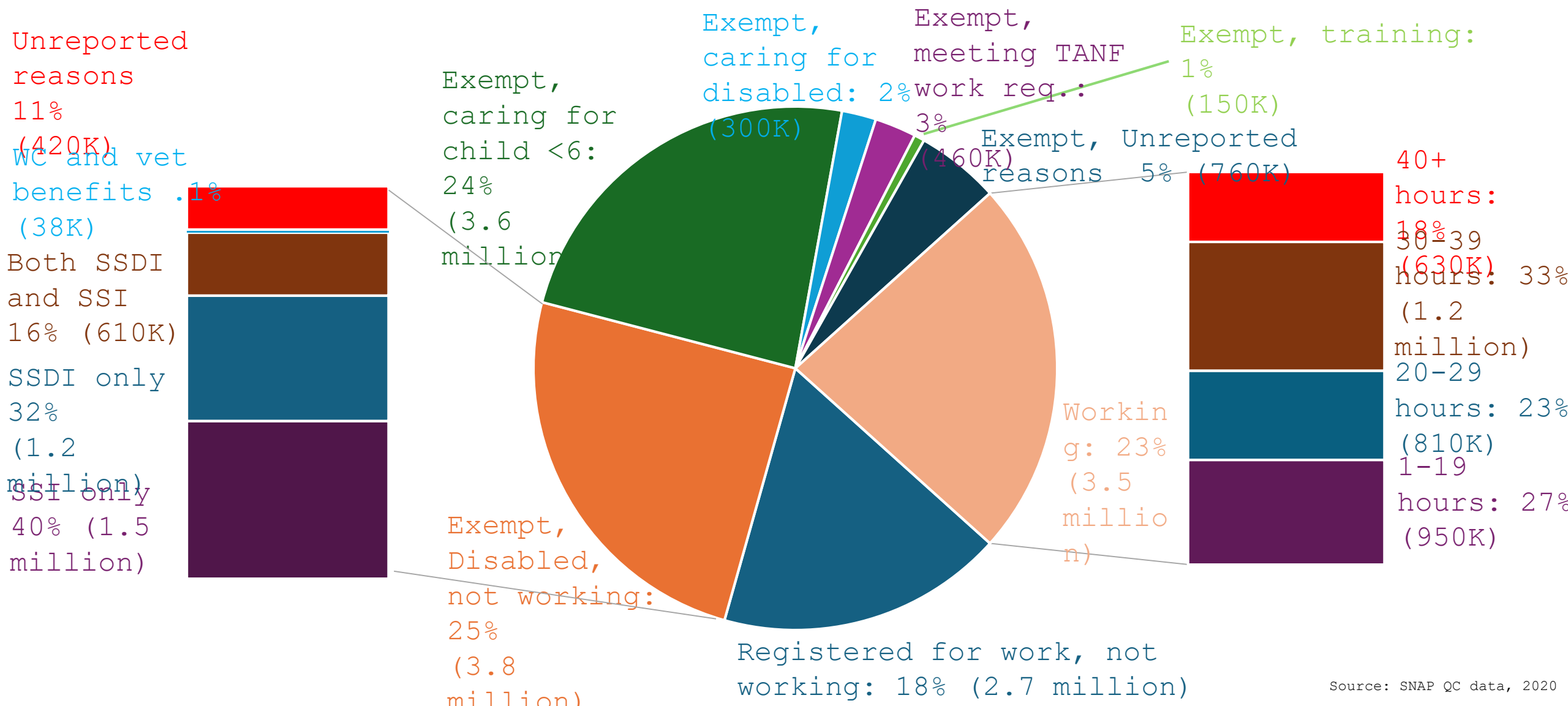
We Use SNAP QC Data

Do They Accurately Estimate Work Effort?

- Cross-sectional data can increase the impact of long-term recipients on work rates (Bane and Ellwood 1986).
- Most SNAP households (about 80%) are in a certification period of 12 months or longer.
- Average certification periods:
 - ABAWDs: 10.5 months
 - Families with children: 10 months
 - Disabled adults: 18 months
- Hence, QC data could overstate non-work of overall SNAP population.
 - Because those on short spells may find work more quickly.

Work Status of Adult SNAP Recipients

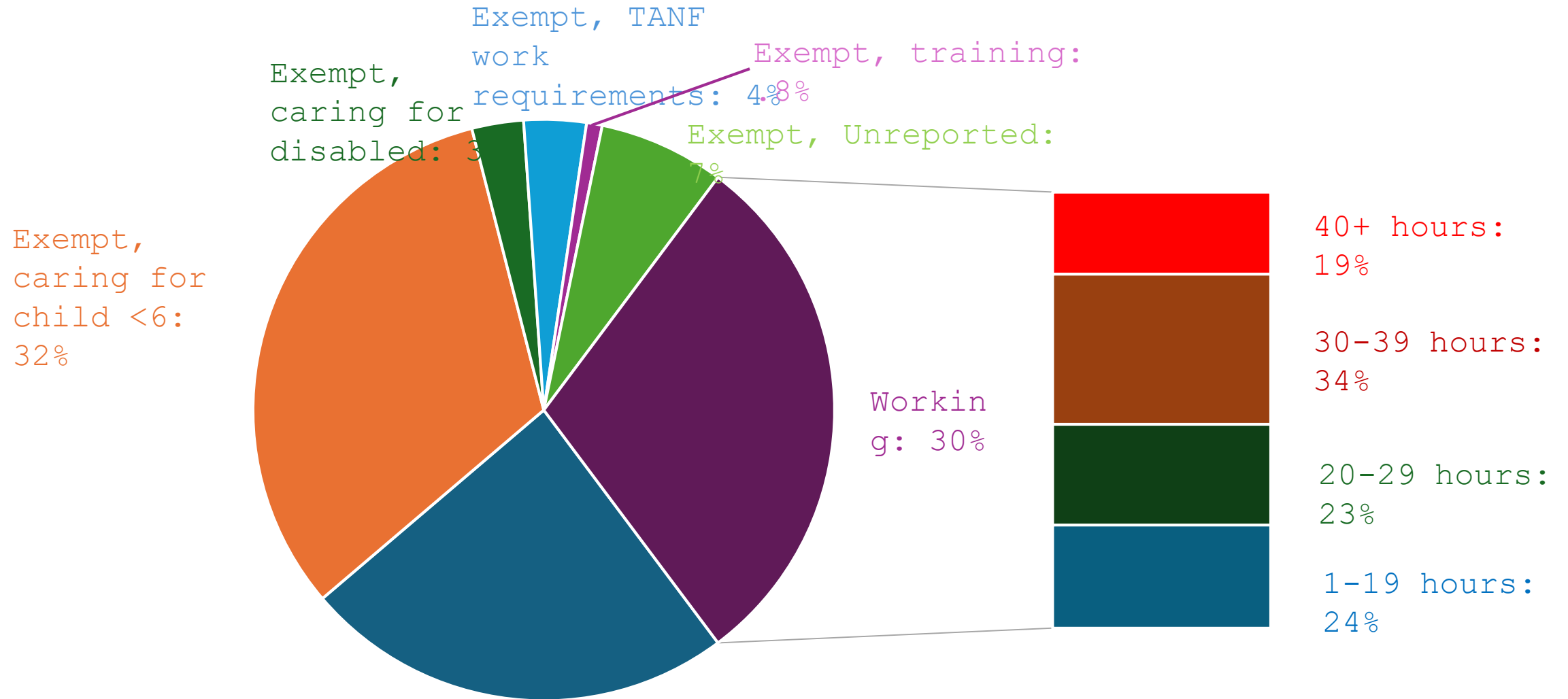
Adults (18-59), Average Monthly SNAP QC Data, October 2019-February 2020



Source: SNAP QC data, 2020

Work Status of Non-Disabled SNAP Recipients

46% of nonworking adults 18-59 were exempt from SNAP work registration
 (Average Monthly SNAP QC data; October 2019-February 2020)



Registered for work, not working: 24%

Able-bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs)

Adults (18-49), Average Monthly SNAP QC Data, October 2019-February 2020

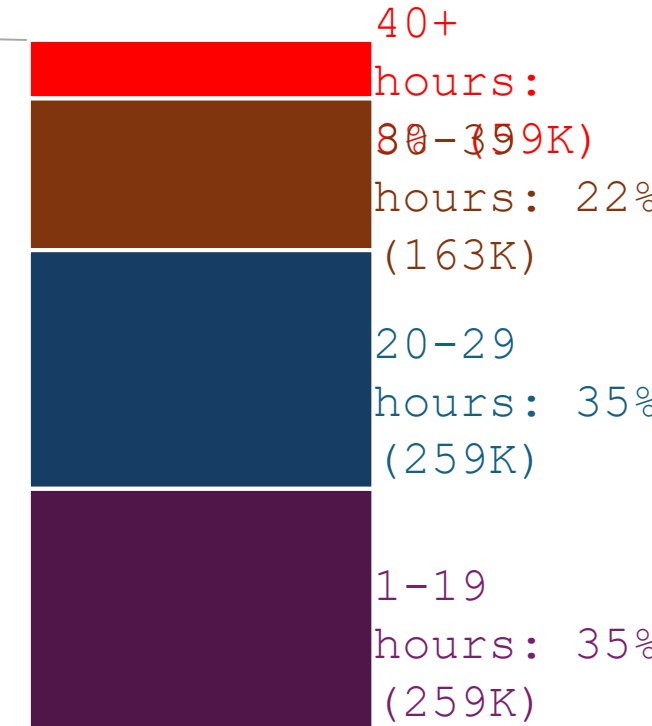
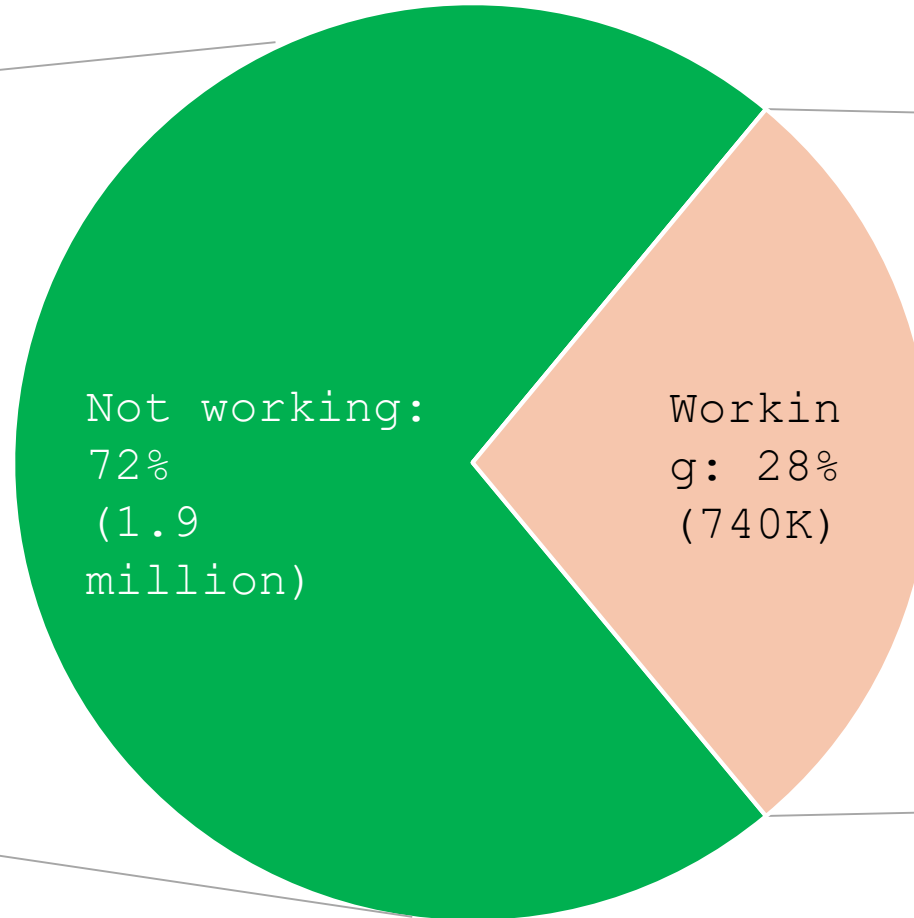
15% exception
2% (43K)

Meets SNAP
"work" req.
10% (197K)

Reg for
work 10%
(197K)
In 1st or
2nd

3-month
period 14%
(263K)

State ABAWD
waiver 61%
(1.2
million)



How Might Work Effort Be Increased?

Assuming One Favors Encouraging Recipients to Work

- **State action: *Increase engagement of those currently expected to work.***
 - Activate those registered for work, e.g. with children <6; and
 - Encourage an increase in the number of hours worked, especially those reporting only 1-19 hrs of work in a week.
- **Federal action: *Expand work expectations.***
 - Mandate more hours of work for ABAWDs, from 80 hrs/mo to as much as 120 hrs/mo;
 - Set a minimum number of hours for other non-exempt adult recipients; and
 - Reduce age exemption for young children, from <6 yrs to <3 yrs, or, even, <1 yr. (As under TANF)

Make E&T Mandatory and State Services Required?

- **Some people might only support expanded work requirements if coupled with increased resources for:**
 - The SNAP E&T program, specifically; or
 - Consolidated public employment offices that would serve all jobseekers receiving public assistance (including recipients of TANF, UI, WIOA, public housing, etc.).
- **SNAP E+T is limited; expansion would entail a substantial increase in spending:**
 - Federal expenditures = \$403 million; state expenditures = \$247 million
 - Participants = 315,000
 - Only about 20 percent of states have mandatory E+T programs

Notes/Explanation

- The total number of Adult SNAP recipients (15.2 million) and ABAWDS (2.7 million) comes from Table 3.6.a of the USDA report *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2020*. These numbers are applied to the distribution of the SNAP QC data. These percentages are unweighted, but when weights are applied, the changes are very small (about 1 p.p.)
- SNAP QC data do not identify reasons for exemption. Hence, types of exemptions are imputed based on whether the household includes a child under 6 or someone with a disability, someone receiving TANF, and someone receiving employment and training but not receiving TANF.

