

Federal SNAP cuts underscore Alabama's need to protect and increase food access

By LaTrell Clifford Wood, hunger policy advocate (latrell@alarise.org) | January 2026

Alabama's food insecurity rates are among the worst in the country. More than 1 in 6 people in our state (17%) face food insecurity, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health. And that share is even larger for children: Nearly 1 in 4 Alabama children (23%) live in households with food insecurity.

Food assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are especially important to help struggling families make ends meet and keep food on the table across our state. And school meals provide vital nutrition for hundreds of thousands of children, helping them learn and grow.

In 2026, Alabama Arise will support stronger investments in child nutrition. This includes legislation to ensure continued funding for SUN Bucks and increased flexibility for schools to provide no-cost meals to all of their students. Arise also will advocate to protect SNAP and oppose additional red tape for participants.

SNAP threats grow, even as food prices continue to rise

SNAP benefits lapsed for the first time ever amid a federal government shutdown in November 2025. This lapse temporarily left more than 750,000 Alabamians without food assistance. In Alabama, more than 67% of SNAP participants are in families with children, while more than

39% of participants are in families with an older adult or a person with a disability.

HR 1, the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill Act, poses longer-term federal threats to SNAP. The law shifts costs to states while limiting or ending access for many families with children, older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities. In Alabama, lawmakers will have to appropriate \$35 million a year to cover the larger share of administrative costs shifted to the state.

People seeking asylum (including those fleeing domestic violence) who are legally in the United States will no longer be eligible for SNAP, with few exemptions. Some people between ages 60 and 65 who have received special SNAP benefits may face more barriers to participation. And people who purchase groceries with SNAP will continue to receive an average of only \$6 a day indefinitely, even as prices continue to increase.

Under HR 1, the following groups will no longer be exempt from burdensome work reporting requirements to receive SNAP benefits:

- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- People experiencing homelessness
- Young adults who age out of foster care
- Adults in households with children as young as 14
- People aged 55 to 64

Some state lawmakers are proposing even more SNAP limits. Rep. Reed Ingram, R-Montgomery, has prefiled HB 31, which would restrict the items that SNAP benefits can purchase.

We must continue to expand access to school meals

Arise members voted overwhelmingly to support increased access to no-cost school meals in 2026. School meals are an especially vital lifeline for families experiencing hunger. School meals also help ensure a stable learning environment for all Alabama children.

Since 2019, nearly 270,000 Alabama children have gained access to no-cost school meals, nearly doubling access. More than 2 in 3 Alabama students attend a school that offers no-cost school meals, according to the Food Research and Action Center.

During the same time period:

- Alabama has shown more growth in fourth-grade math than any other state since 2019, according to the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA).
- Alabama is one of two states where public school fourth-graders are scoring higher in both reading and math than they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, PARCA found.
- Among Alabama students in grades 3-8, both students who are experiencing poverty and those who are not saw improvements in both math and reading performance from 2019-24, according to the Education Recovery Scorecard compiled by researchers from Harvard University and Stanford University.

Providing school breakfast at all public schools would be an important step to improve child nutrition and student success. School breakfast reduces chronic absenteeism, improves standardized testing and math scores and reduces behavioral problems.

The Legislature appropriated \$7.3 million in 2025 to expand access to no-cost school breakfasts for more public schools. More than 190,000 children in schools across Alabama benefited last fall from this investment in making school meals more readily available.

Alabama schools served 2.8 million more school meals last year than in 2024. We must continue to improve upon these investments to ensure every Alabama child has an opportunity to learn and grow to their fullest potential.

SUN Bucks are a summer lifeline for Alabama children

Arise members sent thousands of messages to their legislators in 2024, advocating successfully for the state administrative funding needed to implement SUN Bucks (a.k.a. Summer EBT). Alabama administered the SUN Bucks program for the first time in summer 2025.

Children were automatically eligible to receive SUN Bucks if the child's household received assistance under Medicaid, SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and/or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or if the child was in foster care or experiencing homelessness.

The program was a resounding success in its first year. In 2025, 476,000 Alabama children received \$120 to purchase groceries over the summer months. That money reduced hunger and boosted the economy. Both SNAP and SUN Bucks generate \$1.50 to \$1.80 in local economic activity for every dollar spent. In 2025 alone, SUN Bucks had a \$85.5 million to \$102.6 million impact on Alabama's economy.

Bottom line

School meals, SNAP and SUN Bucks are good for families and good for the economy. Alabama must continue to invest in these vital nutrition programs in 2026 and beyond.