

Thousands in city could lose SNAP benefits in March

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NEW BRITAIN — With the partial shutdown of the federal government continuing to make history with its longevity, organizations who help low income individuals are monitoring the situation carefully and hope a conclusion is reached sooner rather than later.

Benefits from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are currently funded through February, but funding for the program beyond that and into March is unknown. SNAP is a federally funded program that provides financial assistance to low income people to go toward food.

SNAP benefits from February have been sent out early in Connecticut, and recipients saw the benefit reflected in their EBT card account Sunday. Going forward through February, the Connecticut Department of Social Services will continue to process new applications and other services related to SNAP.

"When it became clear that the partial shutdown would not end quickly, DSS began working with the Food and Nutrition Service and other stakeholders

to insure issuance of February benefits occurred," said Daniel Giacomini, DSS SNAP program administration manager. "After initial conversations, FNS determined that the best course of action was to provide SNAP benefits to all eligible members early."

Giacomini clarified that this was not an "extra" or bonus benefit deposit.

"We encourage staff, when speaking with clients, to strongly recommend that they budget their SNAP benefits accordingly to ensure the amount received provides for their food needs through the entire month of February," Giacomini said.

For organizations like the Human Resources Agency of New Britain, stakeholders have a "wait and see" mentality regarding the shutdown. According to Connecticut Department of Social Services' most recent available data, 21,054 people in New Britain received SNAP benefits in 2015-2016, many of which are HRA clients.

"The domino effect that this shutdown is having across all of our society and economy is devastating. The next 2 weeks will be critical. If the government doesn't resolve this by the

end of January lower income children and families will suffer the most," said Rocco Tricarico, executive director of the HRA of New Britain. "Family budgets will be strained because children won't be fed in school so HRA would expect to see more families at our pantry. We may also see our energy assistance applications swell as families choose to buy food instead of paying their utility bills. Families could face eviction if their rent vouchers aren't processed. Our case managers may also get busier with more people seeking help."

The HRA of New Britain's Osgood Avenue food pantry served roughly 1,000 individuals and families last year. Across all services, the organization served more than 26,000 individuals and families. Food programs the HRA administers like SNAP, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children and the Child and Adult Care Food Program have enough funding to operate through March, but the outlook after that is bleak.

Free school lunches are a similar story. The state Department of Education is partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to ensure that all



Wesley Bunnell | Staff

Volunteers Gloria Dingle, left, and Evlyn Gorgas put together a box of food to be distributed to a visitor to HRA's Food and Resource Center on Osgood Ave on Friday afternoon.

school and child nutrition programs can operate through the month of March.

"HRA feeds about 470 preschool children every day but our families have children in both preschool and public school who won't get breakfast and lunch," said Amy Griswold, director of early childhood education programs at the HRA. "We're very concerned about all nutrition

programs that help feed children and families all over the city if the shutdown is not resolved by the end of January."

Monday was the 31st day of the partial government shutdown.

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