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People are struggling to feed their children: this is not the time to cut SNAP | Opinion

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By Guest Editorial

Editor's Note: This article was submitted before Congress passed the president's budget bill.

Drs. Hans Kersten and Félice Lê-Scherban

One of us, Dr. Kersten, previously directed a clinic caring for young children who struggle to grow and stay healthy. He's seen firsthand how critical a healthy diet is to give children a shot at a healthy future. Yet many families struggle to provide the basics for their children.

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Dr. Kersten's clinical experience mirrors what we've heard from dozens of caregivers with young kids in Philadelphia and surrounding counties in our research on children's health.

Caregivers describe the stress of making sure their children get enough healthy food on a limited income. They feel squeezed between rising food prices and dialed-back assistance programs, in some cases resorting to payment plans for food or sacrificing their own nutrition for their kids.

For these families, programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Child Tax Credit, and Medicaid are a crucial pillar of support.

Yet the House of Representatives recently passed unprecedented cuts to these programs that help children. Instead, their bill prioritizes tax cuts for the wealthiest households and forces those with the lowest incomes to pay more.

But Senators still have time to chart a different course. Pennsylvania Congressmembers can and must stand up to protect millions of families and children across our state.

SNAP provides a crucial foundation for children's healthy growth and development and is one of the most effective tools to fight food insecurity. It currently supports more than 2 *million* Pennsylvanians. By shielding children from health problems, SNAP can also help prevent avoidable health and education costs.

Instead of building on this successful program, the House-passed tax and spending bill would make the largest cut in SNAP history – nearly 30 percent. For the first time in the history of the program, all families that meet eligibility might not be guaranteed nutrition support. Our research shows that when SNAP benefits are reduced or cut off, families are more likely to be in poor health and children are more likely to be at developmental risk.

At the same time, changes to Medicaid would block access to health care, further harming child and family health and straining families and health systems.

In addition to gutting nutrition and health support, the bill would cut 4.5 million American children – including 64,000 Pennsylvanian kids – out of the Child Tax Credit, an evidence-based policy for reducing child poverty. One in 4 kids across the state would not receive the full benefit of the CTC - paradoxically, because their families earn too little.

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State leaders, including Gov. Josh Shapiro, are begging Congress to see that state budgets are unable to fill this funding gap. This is not a partisan issue. Pennsylvanian Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have also voiced opposition over deep spending cuts to SNAP and Medicaid.

For rapidly growing young children and their families, policy changes have real-time effects on health. Any cuts to SNAP, Medicaid, and other public benefit programs will harm children's health and result in increased health care and education costs for the federal and state government.

As families across Pennsylvania face rising costs, the Senate must protect the children they swore to serve. These children, and their families, deserve a fair shot.

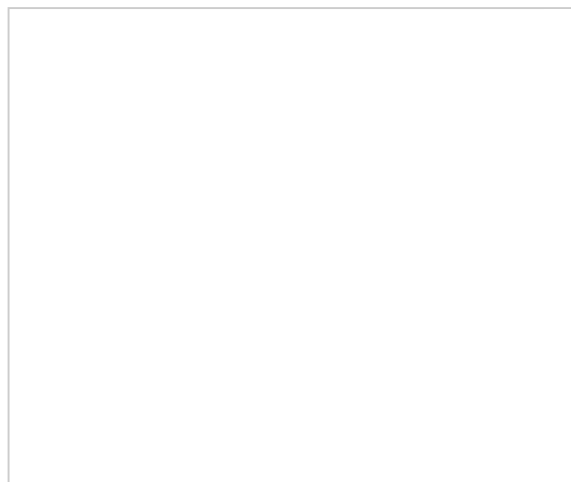
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