



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Feeding Wisconsin Joins Call to Reinstate Waiver for Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents in the Wisconsin FoodShare Program

MADISON, WI – March 22, 2016: On Tuesday, four members of Wisconsin’s Congressional delegation delivered a letter to Governor Walker urging him to reinstate the federal waiver to allow Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs) to access the FoodShare Program without restriction in the 20 counties and 10 cities in Wisconsin with continued high unemployment. Feeding Wisconsin, the statewide association of the six Feeding America food banks operating in Wisconsin, joins with the many local groups and anti-hunger organizations in supporting this effort.

The FoodShare program, a state administered federally funded nutrition program that provides income eligible Wisconsinites with an average of \$110 of monthly benefits to purchase food, is the first line of defense against hunger. There is a federal work requirement for ABAWDs – or more commonly, single adults without children – but it can be waived in areas of high unemployment.

Wisconsin reinstated the work requirement throughout the state in April 2015, requiring childless adults to be engaged in work or work training through the FoodShare Employment and Training Program (FSET) for 80 hours a month or be restricted to only three months of food buying benefits every three years.

Many of the single adults without children that make up this population are the extremely poor living far below the poverty line, many of whom are indigent and hard to reach with information about program changes. They may have an undiagnosed physical or mental limitation that limits their opportunities for training and employment or experience some other barrier to participating in the workforce or FSET. For many childless adults, FoodShare is the only public assistance that is available to them.

“We believe that a good job is the best tool in the fight against hunger. However, what we have seen in the field is that the implementation of the work requirement and the FSET program has not produced the desired results for single adults without children or taxpayers,” said David Lee, Executive Director of Feeding Wisconsin.

“This is due to not fully comprehending the challenges that many ABAWDs face, which has led to far too many people falling through the cracks. For example, our Helpline recently spoke to ‘Lori’ in Fond du Lac County. She had an undiagnosed slipped disk for over twenty years. Due to the severe pain, she had to stop working her job in manufacturing. With no insurance, she was unable to receive a medical exemption from a physician to satisfy the ABAWD requirement.”

Furthermore, due to confusing and unclear program rules, time and eligibility tracking, and participation requirements, many cases have been wrongly terminated. Many of the childless adults who have been cut off have no other recourse and no other public assistance to turn to unless they are able to find a job or are engaged in the FSET program, which itself has been sanctioned for corrective action. The work training programs provided through FSET should provide a real path to opportunity for the people who are able to take advantage of the program.

“Federal waivers offer state great flexibility to fine-tune and tailor FoodShare to meet the needs of people in local communities.” Lee said. “In the areas of continued high unemployment, Wisconsin can and should re-employ the federal work requirement waiver for ABAWDs as it continues to work to improve the access and administration of the FSET program.”

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Feeding Wisconsin is the statewide association of the six Feeding America food banks that provide emergency food assistance and access to benefit assistance in every corner of our state. Its mission is to coordinate, support and enhance the work of its members by securing food and funds, raising public awareness and creating the partnerships necessary to end hunger. The Feeding Wisconsin network of food banks provides over 40 million meals every year to nearly 600,000 people. Together, we are striving forward toward a hunger free Wisconsin. Visit www.FeedingWI.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Pinterest](#).