

Dear Editor,

We appreciated your coverage on January 10th of the impending food crisis for 50,000 people in Cook County ("50,000 Cook County residents will lose food stamps if they don't find work soon, and the clock is ticking"). But one line was troubling and untrue: "DuPage County's work requirement ended up helping David Freedom." Reading further, it's clear that Mr. Freedom was successful in finding a good job because of the workforce services and training he went through, not the work requirement. There is plenty of evidence that work requirements don't work, and that training, education and support do. Investing in proven workforce strategies and supporting families with food assistance will always be more effective than saying "just get a job." And if someone needs support getting a job, that should never be an excuse to take away their food, which is the main result of work requirements.

More importantly, the work requirement is completely impractical: the fact is that our publicly-invested workforce development system does not remotely have the capacity to train and place the approximately 50,000 residents who could soon lose food assistance. In FY 19, the County's federally funded (U.S. Dept. of Labor) workforce system served 4,307 low-income adults, with fewer than 3,000 accessing training. And, as the article states, many individuals don't have the education or relevant skills for available jobs and need basic skills and wraparound support services before they are suitable to begin training. If they had the necessary skills, education, and supports, the majority of these individuals would already be working. This draconian policy is mean-spirited and ineffective. Rather than taking away people's ability to eat, let's invest in education and workforce strategies, along with crucial supports, to help people succeed.

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