

Securing SNAP for Marshallese Arkansans

Every Arkansan should have access to adequate and nutritious food. But all too often, our “safety net” programs leave out the ones who need it most. For example, people born in the Marshall Islands are left out of the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is the program that gives people EBT cards to buy food. This is a longstanding oversight in federal law that we could fix with legislation now under consideration by Congress.

There are several solutions being considered right now:

The proposed Compact Impact Fairness Act	This bill is co-sponsored by U.S. Representative Steve Womack and U.S. Senator John Boozman. It would allow Compact of Free Association (COFA) migrants, like the Marshallese, to qualify for most safety net programs. The legislation is S.792, sponsored by Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii. This is the best solution. Because it not only addresses inequities in SNAP but also other federal programs.
The 2023 Farm Bill	The Farm Bill rewrites SNAP policy about every five years, and it’s up for reauthorization this fall. A provision could easily be added to extend SNAP eligibility to COFA migrants. A similar solution for Medicaid eligibility passed in Congress in late 2020. It had support from both Republicans and Democrats. The law has a made a huge difference in the health of the Marshallese community. Senator John Boozman is a leader in writing the Farm Bill, as Ranking Member of the Senate Agriculture Committee.
Requiring eligibility in renegotiated Compacts	Another solution could be to include restoration of SNAP and other program eligibility in new compacts with COFA nations. These nations include the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau. The renegotiations of the compacts are happening right now. A key lawmaker in these talks is also from Arkansas, U.S. Representative Bruce Westerman. He is Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources.