
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1482

AN ACT CONCERNING MAXIMIZING USE OF FEDERAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FUNDS AND THE RESTAURANT MEALS PROGRAM FOR THE NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF ELDERLY PERSONS AND OTHERS.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioner to (1) develop a plan to participate in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Restaurant Meals Program and (2) maximize the use of federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds to provide nutritious meals to elderly people living at home or in congregate housing. The bill establishes (1) an advisory committee to assist the commissioner in developing the Restaurant Meals Program and (2) a task force to study and make recommendations on maximizing SNAP funds to expand nutritional services for the elderly.

The bill also requires the attorney general, beginning October 1, 2025, to annually report to the Commerce, Human Services, and Judiciary committees on any (1) price discrimination investigations launched under state law against grocery stores in any area of Connecticut, including a food desert; (2) investigations into price discrimination under federal law, of which he is aware; and (3) legislative recommendations that may be necessary to protect consumers against discrimination. Under the bill, a "food desert" is an area of the state identified as such in the USDA's Food Access Research Atlas.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

RESTAURANT MEALS PROGRAM

The bill requires the DSS commissioner, in consultation with the advisory committee established by this bill (see below), to develop a plan to participate in the USDA's Restaurant Meals Program to offer a

variety of restaurant choices and healthy meal options to SNAP recipients who are at least age 60, disabled, or homeless, or their spouses (i.e. “eligible beneficiaries”). The Restaurant Meals Program allows eligible beneficiaries to use their SNAP benefits to purchase meals at participating restaurants. Under Connecticut’s current SNAP program, benefits may be used to purchase food for consumption at home, but not alcohol, tobacco, prepared hot foods, or non-food items.

The bill requires the commissioner to (1) report on the plan to the Human Services Committee by November 1, 2025, and (2) by December 1, 2025, apply to the USDA for Connecticut to participate in the Restaurant Meals Program.

Advisory Group

The bill establishes a 13-member advisory committee to assist the DSS commissioner in developing the Restaurant Meals Program in Connecticut. The committee must study best practices for state implementation of the program across the country.

Membership. The committee members must include the Human Services Committee House and Senate chairpersons or their designees; the social services and aging and disability services commissioners, or their designees; and a Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity representative who works on nutrition issues and is chosen by the commission’s executive director. An additional eight members are appointed by the six legislative leaders as follows:

1. two members appointed by the House speaker, one of whom must represent community action agencies;
2. two members appointed by the Senate president pro tempore, one of whom must represent a nonprofit organization working on food security issues;
3. one member appointed by the House majority leader, who represents a nonprofit organization working on homelessness;
4. one member appointed by the Senate majority leader, who

represents a nonprofit organization working on minority populations' health outcomes;

5. one member appointed by the House minority leader, who represents a restaurant that has participated in, or is interested in participating in, the Restaurant Meals Program; and
6. one member appointed by the Senate minority leader, who represents a nonprofit organization working on issues concerning aging people.

Appointing authorities must make their initial appointments within 30 days after the bill's passage and fill any vacancies. Appointed members may be legislators.

Leadership and Meetings. The bill requires the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore to select the advisory committee's chairpersons from among its members, who must schedule and hold the committee's first meeting within 60 days after the bill's passage. The bill requires the Human Services Committee's administrative staff to serve in this capacity for the advisory committee.

Reporting Requirements. The committee must submit interim recommendations for developing the program in Connecticut to the DSS commissioner by October 1, 2025. Starting by January 1, 2026, the advisory committee must report its findings and recommendations to the DSS commissioner and Aging and Human Services committees annually until the program is established. The advisory committee's recommendations must include any legislation necessary to establish the program.

MAXIMIZING SNAP FUNDS FOR ELDERLY NUTRITION

The bill requires the DSS commissioner, in consultation with the aging and disability services commissioner, area agencies on aging (AAA; see BACKGROUND), and the task force the bill establishes (see below), to maximize the use of federal SNAP funds to give nutritious meals to elderly people living at home or in congregate housing, including by establishing the Restaurant Meals Program.

Starting by December 31, 2025, the DSS commissioner must report twice annually to the Aging and Human Services committees on the following:

1. SNAP funding used for these meals,
2. any federal law impediments to using SNAP funds for these meals, and
3. any state appropriations needed to ensure the program serves all SNAP-eligible people.

Task Force

The bill establishes a 12-member task force to study and make recommendations on maximizing the use of SNAP funds to expand nutritional services for elderly people, including establishing a Restaurant Meals Program.

Study. Under the bill, the task force study must include a review of the following:

1. the Department of Aging and Disability Services's elderly nutrition program (see BACKGROUND) and ways to use SNAP funds to expand it,
2. the costs of preparing and delivering meals under the elderly nutrition program,
3. a comparison of the number of elderly nutrition program participants and the number of people in need of nutritional services,
4. the adequacy of state funding for the elderly nutrition program, and
5. the process for contracting with elderly nutrition services providers.

Membership. The task force membership must include the Human

Services Committee House and Senate chairpersons and the aging and disability services and social services commissioners, or their designees. An additional eight members must be appointed by the six legislative leaders as follows:

1. two AAA representatives, one each from the eastern AAA and the north central AAA appointed by the House speaker;
2. two AAA representatives, one each from the south central AAA and the southwestern AAA, appointed by the Senate president pro tempore;
3. one western AAA representative appointed by the House majority leader;
4. an elderly nutrition provider representing a community action agency appointed by the Senate majority leader;
5. an elderly nutrition provider representative appointed by the House minority leader; and
6. a senior citizen receiving meals through the elderly nutrition program appointed by the Senate minority leader.

The appointing authorities must make their initial appointments within 30 days after the bill's passage and fill any vacancies. Appointed members may be legislators.

Leadership and Meetings. The bill requires the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore to select the task force's chairpersons from among its members, who must schedule the task force's first meeting by September 1, 2025. Under the bill, the Human Services Committee's administrative staff must serve in this capacity for the task force.

Reporting Requirements. The bill requires the task force to report its findings and recommendations to the Aging and Human Services committees by January 15, 2026. The task force terminates on this date or when it submits its report, whichever is later.

BACKGROUND***Area Agencies on Aging***

AAAs are private, nonprofit planning and service agencies that receive state and federal funds to carry out the Older Americans Act's requirements. Generally, they plan, coordinate, evaluate, and act as brokers for older adult services. They award funds to local agencies, which in turn provide meals and related social services at local sites.

Elderly Nutrition Program

Under federal law, the Department of Aging and Disability Services oversees 11 elderly nutrition providers that offer nutritionally sound meals to people age 60 or older and their spouses. Programs must provide one meal per day, five days per week. These meals are either offered at congregate sites, known as "senior community cafes," or delivered to the homes of people too frail to travel to the congregate locations or cook for themselves. People with disabilities living in housing facilities that are congregate meal sites may also receive meals. Meals are free, although contributions are encouraged. Both federal and state funds are used to pay the program costs.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 16 Nay 6 (03/18/2025)