

The RESTORE Act Can Reduce Recidivism

Naomi F. Sugie, University of California, Irvine
Carol J. Newark, Harm Reduction Institute

The RESTORE Act would repeal the federal ban that prevents people convicted of drug-related felonies from receiving food stamps for their lifetimes. Many states have opted out of this federal policy since it was enacted in 1996; however, 21 states still have the ban in place with full or modified conditions, which creates higher barriers to accessing SNAP benefits and limits the number of people who receive them.

In a [recent study](#) evaluating the federal food stamps ban, we find that the bans increase recidivism, resulting in higher rates of rearrest. Specifically:

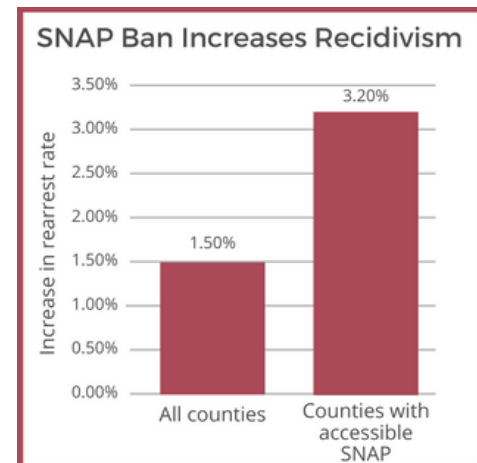


- **Being banned from receiving food stamps results in a 1.5% increase in arrest rates over a 5-year period.**
- **In places that already have generally better access to food stamps, being banned from receiving this benefit results in a 3.2% increase in arrest rates over a 5-year period.**

California Before-and-After SNAP Ban Analysis

In California, the ban barred people from receiving SNAP benefits if they were convicted of a drug felony after August 22, 1996. We conducted a comparison study between two groups in that state: those who were banned from receiving food stamps (defined as those with convictions in the three months after August 22, 1996) and those who were not (defined as those with convictions in the three months before).

Because California's SNAP program policies vary from county-to-county, we also evaluated the impact of the ban in counties with more or less accessible SNAP policies. We found that the ban's higher recidivism rates were concentrated only in counties with more accessible SNAP programs. In counties with restricted SNAP programs, the bans had no measurable impact.



More Accessible SNAP = More Support to Stay Out of Jail

Given these findings, it is clear that the RESTORE Act can reduce recidivism, especially in places that have more accessible SNAP programs. We recommend that policymakers:

- **Support the RESTORE Act to repeal the federal ban in all states.**
- **Ensure that SNAP programs are accessible to all eligible individuals. Reducing administrative barriers to applying for benefits (e.g., not requiring fingerprints, drug tests), lengthening periods between recertifications, providing benefits in easy-to-use methods, and not requiring work reporting have all been shown to increase access.**

