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The Tennessee Justice Center Calls for Action as SNAP Skimming Crisis Leaves Vulnerable Families Unprotected

January. 6th, 2025 — In one of its first official acts, the incoming administration has doubled down on government *inefficiency*. In the Congressional budget deal negotiated after the intervention of the President-Elect and his Department of Government Efficiency watchdogs, Congress ended protection for low-income Tennessee families whose food benefits are stolen by crime rings. Punishing Tennessee families who are the unwitting victims of crime is exactly the sort of government inefficiency that Donald Trump and his team vowed to root out. The Tennessee Justice Center implores the incoming administration to make this right.

On November 13, Elon Musk encouraged Americans to let him know “[a]nytime the public thinks we are cutting something important or not cutting something wasteful[!]" Well, Elon, this is one of those times.

Over 11,000 vulnerable Tennessee families were victims of crime rings that target SNAP recipients. SNAP benefits, formerly “food stamps,” allow low-income families to use a benefit card at grocery stores to buy food. In a nation-wide assault on food insecure families, crime rings have extracted the benefits from SNAP cards. This problem is the result of criminals exploiting a known weakness of these cards: they use a magnetic strip rather than a secure EMV chip, like the ones found on credit cards. This has been going on for years -- another hurdle for families who are already struggling.

Congress has addressed this issue, in part, by reimbursing SNAP recipients whose benefits were stolen. As a direct result of Mr. Musk and Mr. Trump’s intervention, Congress has ended this protection for low-income Tennesseans as of December 21, 2024.

“This change lets the federal government off the hook for its own negligence in administering the SNAP program using old, vulnerable technology,” says Signe Anderson, Senior Director of Nutrition Advocacy

at TJC. “The manifest unfairness of this change suggests that it was implemented with a careless lack of consideration. We must do better.”

As part of its mission to end hunger in the State of Tennessee, TJC urges the following steps:

1. The incoming administration must work with Congress to reverse this misstep and reimburse families whose food benefits are stolen.
2. Families who currently receive benefits must understand that -- until the Trump Administration acts -- their cards are vulnerable to criminals, and they must take steps to protect themselves. See [here](#) for a step-by-step video that we created.
3. Tennesseans of all stripes must reach out to their Congress people to encourage them to protect SNAP families in the upcoming Budget Reconciliation.
4. Governor Lee should immediately put forward state legislation to 1. protect SNAP cards, and 2. step in to reimburse Tennessee families until the federal government fixes this issue.

TJC plans to hold the incoming administration accountable to its promise to make government more efficient. Stay informed. Join our [webinar](#) on January 8, 2025 at 11:30am CT, *SNAP Cuts in the New Congress*.

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[About Tennessee Justice Center / \[www.tnjustice.org\]\(http://www.tnjustice.org\)](#)

For over 26 years, the Tennessee Justice Center has been standing with vulnerable Tennessee families and helping them access basic necessities of life. Since opening our doors in 1996, TJC has used lawsuits, legislation and coalition building to overcome injustice, winning \$2 billion in health care and hundreds of millions in financial and nutrition assistance for Tennesseans. Aside from lawsuits, TJC helps assist seniors and other individuals with TennCare, SNAP and other public benefit programs.