

Food Stamp Cutoff a Matter of Geography for Area Immigrants

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Body

The District, Maryland and Virginia have adopted different timetables for implementing a provision of the new national welfare law that denies federally funded **food stamps** to many legal **immigrants** who are not citizens.

Starting today, **immigrants** who apply for **food stamps** in the District will be screened to determine whether they fall into certain exempt categories, including refugees in their first five years in the country, U.S. military veterans and legal residents who have worked 40 quarters.

Immigrants now receiving **food stamps** in the District will be screened as their benefits expire. Legal **immigrants** make up only about 1 percent of the estimated 98,000 people receiving **food stamps** in the city, said John M. Bayne, who heads the District's Income Maintenance Administration.

Under the immigration bill passed yesterday by Congress, legal **immigrants** who were receiving **food stamps** on Aug. 22 -- the date the welfare law was enacted -- will be allowed to keep receiving them until April 1, even if they are found to be ineligible when their benefits expire.

From April 1 to Aug. 22 of next year, states can drop legal **immigrants** off the **food stamp** rolls if they no longer are eligible.

In Maryland, new applicants will be screened starting today, state officials said. For legal **immigrants** now receiving **food stamps**, the state has postponed implementing changes until Nov. 1 to give recipients a month's notice. Information was mailed Friday to all **food stamp** recipients notifying them of changes in the law.

The delay means that no legal **immigrants** who are receiving **food stamps** will lose their October benefits, said Corinne Stevens, who oversees crisis, income and victim services for Montgomery County's Health and Human Services Department.

As of Aug. 1, Montgomery County had about 3,800 legal **immigrants** receiving **food stamps**, Stevens said, but she did not know how many were children. Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D) has said the state will assume the \$ 2.1 million cost of continuing to provide **food stamps** to the children of legal **immigrants**.

Virginia began denying **food stamps** to new noncitizen applicants last week. In Fairfax County, which has one of the **area's** largest **immigrant** populations, county officials said it was too early to determine how many new applicants had been turned down after one week.

In the Falls Church office, which serves about half of the county's 4,000 legal **immigrant** families receiving **food stamps**, at least one person living in a shelter for the homeless was denied emergency **food stamps**, officials said. The applicant arrived in the United States as a refugee 15 years ago and did not qualify for the five-year exempt period. Officials declined to identify the person or the shelter, citing privacy laws.

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Meanwhile, the county is extending benefits for a maximum of 12 months for legal **immigrants** who already receive **food stamps**.

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