

**Bush seeks to loosen food-stamp restrictions;**  
**The President will ask Congress to let legal**  
**immigrants receive the aid sooner after arriving.**

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## **Body**

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**President Bush** intends to **ask Congress** to restore **food stamps** to **legal immigrants** who were banned from the program by 1996 welfare **restrictions**, an administration official said yesterday.

**Bush's** proposal, which would **loosen restrictions** that **President** Bill Clinton signed into law five years ago, is backed by advocates for Hispanic **immigrants**, a growing bloc of voters whom both Democrats and Republicans want to attract.

The plan, to be presented next month in **Bush's** 2003 budget, would make **food stamps** available to **legal immigrants** once they have lived in the United States for five years, according to Amy Call, spokeswoman for the Office of Management and Budget. Currently, **immigrants** cannot **receive food stamps** unless they have worked in the United States for a decade.

Call said **Bush's** proposal would place **food stamps** on par with other welfare programs, including Medicaid and children's health care, that are available to **legal immigrants after** five years of residency.

'Child well-being'

"The **President** feels that this proposal is important to not only make this consistent with other federal welfare programs, but it **will** improve child well-being by increasing **food-stamp** benefits to low-income households, most of which include children," Call said.

The income-based program would be phased in over three years, to reach an estimated 363,000 by 2006, she said. It would add \$2.1 billion over 10 years to the \$17 billion-a-year **food-stamp** program. The White House has not said how it would pay for the program.

Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (D., Ill.), who has fought to restore the **food-stamp** benefit to **immigrants** since 1996, said in a statement that **Bush** was acting "not only compassionately, but wisely and logically."

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Friction ahead?

"These are people who are in this country legally, who contribute to our economy and our communities, and who pay billions of dollars in taxes to help finance programs which they themselves are barred from using," said Gutierrez, chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus' Immigration Task Force.

The White House proposal could create friction with Democrats. Senate Democratic leaders have proposed changing the current law to require that immigrants work in this country - not just live here - for four years before becoming eligible for food stamps. Democrats say their more restrictive proposal would leave more money for farm subsidies.

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D., Iowa) has proposed expanding the food-stamp program to include more disabled Americans, refugees and asylum-seekers. Although he supports Bush's proposal, he is concerned about how it would be financed, Harkin spokeswoman Tricia Enright said.

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