



COLAs Don't Count Act of 2026

Led in the Senate by: Sens. Peter Welch (D-Vt.); Alex Padilla (D-Calif.); Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.); Ron Wyden (D-Ore.); Ed Markey (D-Mass.); Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.)

Introduced in the House by: Reps. Gwen Moore (D-WI-04); Judy Chu (D-CA-28); Becca Balint (D-VT-AL); Julia Brownley (D-CA-26); Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC-AL); Mark Pocan (D-WI-02); Bobby Scott (D-VA-03)

Background: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—known as 3Squares in Vermont—is designed to help low-income households afford a nutritionally-adequate and low-cost diet. In 2023, approximately 9 million Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries were also SNAP recipients, with 33% of SNAP households receiving Social Security benefits (an average of \$1,096) and 23% of households receiving SSI benefits (an average of \$723 monthly). Each year, Social Security beneficiaries receive a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) provided through the *Social Security Act* to ensure the value of benefits is not eroded by inflation. The COLA increase from 2023 to 2026 is approximately 8.8%. During this time, households receiving Social Security may have seen their SNAP benefits reduced by as much as 2.6%. Furthermore, if COLA increases put a household's monthly income over the income limit, those households will lose their eligibility for SNAP benefits.

However, when the income of a SNAP household rises, beneficiaries face a potential reduction in SNAP benefits or risk becoming ineligible, creating a "benefits cliff." Further, as COLAs raise a household's overall income—and are not considered an allowable deduction under SNAP income eligibility requirements—it can impact households' ability to receive vital food assistance. For example, in 2023, an estimated 28,000 SNAP households lost their eligibility for the program as a result of Social Security COLAs, and 36% of SNAP recipients saw a decrease of an average of \$32 a month in benefits. Permitting a deduction for these COLAs would provide a more accurate representation of a household's available income and ensure vulnerable households can continue to access SNAP benefits.

Legislation: The *COLAs Don't Count Act of 2026* would allow SNAP households to deduct annual Social Security COLAs from their income when calculating eligibility for the food assistance program. In doing so, the bill also seeks to address the benefits cliff to safeguard the significant health benefits associated with SNAP, including enhanced food security, health, and overall well-being. Railroad retirement and veterans' benefits COLAs and state supplementation program payments would similarly be exempt.

Endorsing Organizations: The *COLAs Don't Count Act* is endorsed by the Food and Research Action Center; Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin; Hunger Free Vermont; Hunger Task Force; National Council on Aging; Social Security Works; and the Strengthen Social Security Coalition.