

Equitable Access to Safety Net Programs for the Latino Community in Georgia

Introduction

Latino families in Georgia—over one million strong and growing by more than 37% between 2010 and 2022, outpacing national growth—play a vital role in the state’s labor force and economic vitality. Yet they remain disproportionately excluded from safety net programs that promote food security, health access, housing stability, and long-term opportunity.¹

The 2025 passage of federal bill H.R. 1, regulatory changes such as a reinterpretation of PRWORA, and historic state-level restrictions have dramatically worsened this crisis. Through sweeping cuts to programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and TANF—and the exclusion of various categories of lawfully present immigrants and mixed-status families—these changes not only undermine limited progress but also introduce new state-level burdens that will deeply harm Latino and immigrant households, particularly those that are mixed-status, low-income, low-literacy, low digital literacy, and part of rural populations.

I. H.R. 1 and Federal Safety Net Cuts: A Direct Threat to Latino Communities

According to the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute (GBPI), H.R. 1 includes over \$200 billion in cuts to SNAP alone, along with new eligibility restrictions, increased administrative costs for states, and expanded work-reporting mandates that will disproportionately affect Latino workers and families.² Additionally, H.R. 1 fails to address Medicaid coverage gaps and creates indirect pressures on states that have not expanded Medicaid—like Georgia—by shifting more healthcare costs to state budgets already strained by reduced federal support for food assistance. This combination of SNAP cuts and the continued absence of Medicaid expansion threatens to deepen poverty, increase food insecurity, and worsen health outcomes in Latino communities.

Key provisions include:

- States required to pay 5–15% of SNAP costs if their payment error rates exceed 6%, starting in 2028. Georgia could owe hundreds of millions of dollars if forced to shoulder these costs.
- Administrative cost-sharing increases from 50% to 75% in 2027, requiring Georgia to allocate tens of millions more or risk collapse in application processing.
- Expanded SNAP work-reporting requirements will newly subject 96,000 Georgia adults to stricter rules. Over 154,000 individuals could lose benefits if a household member fails to comply.

- Elimination of SNAP-Ed, the USDA nutrition and obesity prevention education grant, which will cut off programs that support healthy eating and long-term food access.
- Exclusion of legally present immigrants from SNAP benefits, including refugees, survivors of trafficking, those with temporary protections, and asylum seekers.
- Indirect impact on Medicaid enrollment and access, as administrative burden and stricter eligibility verification in one program often spill over to others, making it harder for eligible Latinos to maintain continuous health coverage.
- Exclusion from educational programs like Head Start and dual enrollment—proven tools for low-income families to pursue their aspirations and break the cycle of poverty.

II. The Georgia Landscape: Already Behind

Even before H.R. 1, Georgia's safety net system lagged behind:

- Georgia has not expanded Medicaid, leaving 269,000 adults in the coverage gap. The state was already the only state requiring work from adults and imposing various other provisions that make it extremely likely to limit eligibility on administrative grounds.²
- The state's Pathways to Coverage waiver enrolled only 4,231 people in its first year, with 56% of applicants denied—often due to failing the 80-hour monthly work requirement. This mirrors the same punitive work-reporting logic now being expanded to SNAP under H.R. 1, compounding barriers across programs.²
- 18% of Latino Georgians live below the federal poverty line, compared to 13% of the overall population, yet only 11.2% of Latino households receive SNAP—a gap reflecting systemic access barriers including eligibility restrictions and fear of public charge.¹
- Latino children in Georgia lag the most behind Latino children nationally in health and economic outcomes. Nearly half of Latinas in Georgia are uninsured, contributing to worse maternal health outcomes alongside Black women. Georgia ranks 48th and 49th for adult and child Latino health coverage rates respectively—demonstrating that the Medicaid gap is already a crisis that H.R. 1 will exacerbate.¹

III. How Cuts Disproportionately Harm Latino Georgians

Food Insecurity

Latino families already face higher rates of hunger, particularly in rural areas. SNAP participation among eligible Latinos is disproportionately low due to fear of immigration consequences, language access gaps, and confusing eligibility rules. H.R. 1's changes will increase food insecurity by limiting eligibility and deterring applications, particularly among families with undocumented or noncitizen members.

Healthcare Disruption

Latino children are twice as likely as white children in Georgia to be uninsured (16% vs. 7%). With continuous Medicaid coverage now ended, thousands are losing health insurance due to administrative hurdles, limited translation services, and fear of the “public charge” rule.³

Economic and Workforce Instability

Although Latinos participate in the workforce at higher rates than any other demographic in Georgia, cuts to safety nets make it harder to withstand short-term crises. Without paid leave or childcare support, a single lost paycheck or illness can push families into poverty or eviction. New work-reporting rules for SNAP create additional barriers and red tape, especially for those in shift-based or informal employment.

Exclusion of Immigrants

H.R. 1’s exclusion of humanitarian-status immigrants from SNAP—including refugees, asylum seekers, and survivors of abuse—will directly affect many Latino Georgians. Mixed-status families may choose to forgo benefits for eligible members out of fear, worsening health and food outcomes.

IV. Recommendations for Policy and Program Action

- **Counterbalance Federal Cuts with State Investment:** Use state revenue to fill SNAP and Medicaid funding gaps and ensure continuity of service during periods of federal disruption. Eliminate unnecessary documentation requirements and streamline re-enrollment across programs.
- **Remove Barriers for Mixed-Status and Immigrant Families:** Publicly clarify that use of public benefits by citizen children or spouses will not trigger immigration penalties. Invest in navigator programs housed in trusted, community-based organizations.
- **Expand Multilingual, Culturally Responsive Services:** Require all state benefits portals and agencies to support Spanish and other top non-English languages. Increase funding for Spanish-speaking caseworkers, especially in rural counties. Expand access for community groups to join as community partners for safety net program enrollment, which will require streamlining of processes and support to meet current requirements.
- **Reform SNAP Implementation:** Georgia must reject overly punitive interpretations of the new work requirements and allow for broad exemptions. Restore SNAP-Ed programs at the state level to ensure continued nutrition education and outreach.
- **Monitor and Report Outcomes:** Track enrollment, disenrollment, and denial rates by race/ethnicity and zip code to identify equity gaps. Build accountability into the Pathways waiver by publishing monthly performance dashboards.

Conclusion

Georgia's Latino community is being uniquely harmed by the deep safety net cuts in H.R. 1. These policies not only take food and healthcare away from families in need but also shift costs to the state, forcing hard tradeoffs and administrative chaos.

Now more than ever, Georgia must lead where the federal government is failing. Through targeted investments, inclusive policy design, and trust-based partnerships with Latino-led and immigrant-serving organizations, the state can build a safety net that protects all Georgians.

Latino Community Fund Georgia stands ready to lead advocacy, build partnerships, and advance an equitable future where every family, regardless of immigration status, can thrive.

References & Sources

- [1] Latino Community Fund Georgia. (2024). State of Latinos in Georgia. <https://www.stateoflatinosga.org>
- [2] Georgia Budget & Policy Institute. (2025). "H.R. 1 Impact Analysis: SNAP and Medicaid Cuts in Georgia." <https://gbpi.org>
- [3] HealthBeat Georgia. (2025). "Medicaid Unwinding and Latino Health Coverage Losses." <https://healthbeatgeorgia.org>