

2026 Legislative Priority Proposals
Updated 9/18/25

SNAP Benefits	
El Paso County (Commissioner Carrie Geitner)	
Preferred Contact:	carriegeitner@elpasoco.com
Co-Sponsoring Counties/Commissioners:	None
Who is your subject matter expert?	Brandon Wilson, Government Affairs Advisor, El Paso County, 719-208-9635, BrandonWilson@elpasoco.com Ryan Parsell, Government Affairs Executive Director, El Paso County
Has this proposal been approved by your BoCC?	Yes
Have you reviewed the CCI Instructional Memo?	Yes
Describe the problem your proposal will solve.	<p>The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) currently permits the purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages and candy, despite overwhelming evidence linking these products to chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease—conditions that disproportionately affect low-income populations. As a taxpayer-funded program intended to support nutritional well-being, SNAP’s allowance of nutritionally poor, high-sugar items raises concerns about program alignment with public health goals, fiscal efficiency, and long-term health equity.</p> <p>The Board of County Commissioners is responsible for administering safety net programs. The current SNAP policy conflicts with strategic efforts to improve community wellness and reduce long-term service costs. Moreover, it raises concerns among constituents about the responsible use of taxpayer-supported benefits. Without local authority to regulate SNAP purchases, the board is left to manage the consequences without the tools to enact preventive policy. This creates an urgent need for legislative action at the state level to enable counties to better align SNAP administration with public health objectives.</p>
Areas of Impact:	Functionality of county programs or services.
What is the ultimate source of this problem?	Colorado’s SNAP recipients are disproportionately affected by the prevalence of sugar-sweetened beverages and candy, which are strongly linked to negative health outcomes such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, tooth decay, and liver disease. In Colorado, roughly 29% of adults and 18% of children consume at least one sugary drink

	<p>daily, while 25% of adults are obese and 6.9% have diagnosed diabetes. Because SNAP is a taxpayer-funded program intended to support nutritious food consumption, allowing benefits to be used for soda and candy undermines both public health and fiscal responsibility. Prohibiting these purchases could significantly reduce diet-related chronic diseases, align SNAP policy with health guidelines, and curb healthcare costs.</p>
What is your initial proposal to solve this problem?	<p>El Paso County supports the introduction and passage of state legislation directing the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) to apply for a waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to restrict the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for the purchase of candy or prepared desserts. This legislative effort reflects the County's commitment to promoting public health, advancing nutritional education, and ensuring responsible stewardship of taxpayer-funded assistance programs. By pursuing this waiver, El Paso County seeks to align SNAP purchasing policies with evidence-based dietary guidelines and reduce the burden of diet-related chronic diseases among vulnerable populations in Colorado.</p>
Please provide sample language for this solution.	<p>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Rule Manual Volume 4, SNAP 10-CCR 2506-1</p> <p>4.130.2 ELIGIBLE FOODS Households can only purchase eligible foods with SNAP benefits. Eligible foods include: A. Any food or food product intended for human consumption, except for alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and hot food, including hot food products prepared by the retailer and sold at above room temperature for immediate consumption, and candy and soda. B. Seeds and plants to grow foods for personal consumption by eligible household members.</p> <p><i>El Paso County's proposed legislative change would be to direct CDHS to apply for a waiver from USDA to add candy and prepared desserts to the list of items that cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits in Colorado.</i></p>
Are there any solutions that do not require state-level legislation? Has your county explored these alternatives?	<p>Yes, but we believe that pursuing a legislative solution is the best option at this time.</p>
Has CCI or any other organizations sought a solution to this problem before?	<p>No.</p>

What possible organization(s) would support your proposed solution?	Proponents include the El Paso Board of County Commissioners, Rep. Rose Pugliese, other members of the El Paso County delegation, public health organizations, medical and healthcare providers, nutrition and food policy advocacy groups, and other local governments.
What possible organization(s) would oppose your proposed solution?	Opponents could include members of the El Paso County state delegation, other members of the General Assembly, food and beverage industry groups, and anti-hunger and food access advocacy groups.
Have you spoken with any legislators about your proposed solution? If so, what was their response?	Yes. House Minority Leader Pugliese was interested in the concept and in helping us secure a bill title.
What are the financial implications of this problem to your county? Are there any financial implications to this solution either?	Counties: Savings associated with reduced health and welfare burdens. Potentially some cost associated with high constituent call volume.
What are the financial implications of this problem to any other impacted parties? What are the financial implications of this solution to any other impacted parties? <i>Please consider any relevant Colorado State Departments.</i>	State: potential cost with waiver development, IT upgrades, outreach, etc.
Staff Feedback	<u>Risk / Difficulty</u> : High - In early August, Colorado received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to exempt soda and sugary beverages from SNAP benefits. The state drew significant opposition from food advocacy organizations for submitting and receiving this waiver. This will make the path to seeking additional waivers via legislation very challenging. Additionally, the Colorado Department of Human Services has indicated that applying for waivers is a time-consuming endeavor which may translate into a fiscal note being applied to this bill.

	<u>Time Commitment:</u> Low - The bill language is straightforward, there will likely be members of the minority party desiring to sponsor it, and a minimum number of stakeholder sessions will be needed to explain the bill and have interested parties make position decisions.
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