

Fiscal Cliff Deal a Mixed Bag: More for Low-Income Families, Less for Nutrition Education

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by Triada Stampas

The "Fiscal Cliff" deal struck by Congress at the start of 2013 made a number of changes to the tax code – many of them beneficial for residents with low household income, especially low-income families. With Food Bank research finding 70 percent of low-income families in New York City struggling to afford food, this comes as positive news for the New Year. Regrettably, alongside these gains, Congress enacted immediate and dramatic funding cuts to nutrition education programming for these same families, including our own CookShop and Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables programs. Significantly, the American Taxpayer Relief Act (ATRA), as it was called, extended several important provisions that were set to expire, including expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit, a higher credit rate for the Dependent Care Tax Credit, as well as the American Opportunity Tax Credit, which helps families pay for college. In addition, ATRA prevented an increase in taxes from

kicking in for individuals earning less than \$400,000 (and married couples filing jointly earning less than \$450,000). Although some of these gains may be offset by the two-point increase in the payroll tax deduction, combined, these changes mean low-income tax filers will not see their tax rates increase or their available tax credits drop. In a surprise move, however, Congress decided to make an immediate 48 percent cut to this year's remaining funding for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education (SNAP-Ed) – a loss of more than \$4.8 million for New York State's nutrition education programs that provide SNAP (food stamp)-eligible New Yorkers with the knowledge, resources and skills to make healthy food choices on a limited budget. While Food Bank will make every effort to minimize the impact of this loss on the more than 100,000 New Yorkers our nutrition education programs reach, a mid-year funding cut of this magnitude can't help but be felt. Worse yet, if Congress does not act, more cuts are on the horizon: WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) is scheduled for an eight percent cut on March 1, and SNAP benefits (food stamps) are threatened in the ongoing Farm Bill negotiations. If these benefits are slashed, more New Yorkers struggling to keep food on the table will be forced to turn to our city's already overwhelmed food pantries and soup kitchens. Your advocacy can help. Please contact your Representatives today and tell them to restore SNAP-Ed funding in the next fiscal cliff deal, and protect WIC and SNAP from cuts!

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