

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:**

Mr. Dennis Harrison  
Chief Development Officer  
[Dennis.Harrison@JaxLegalAid.org](mailto:Dennis.Harrison@JaxLegalAid.org)  
(904) 356-8371 ext. 296

**JALA URGES CONGRESS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTH -  
CONFIRMS BASIC NUTRITIONAL NEEDS ARE AT RISK IF IT ACTS TO  
ENFORCE NATIONWIDE SNAP'S CHILD SUPPORT COOPERATION REQUIREMENT**

**JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA, May 10, 2018** -- The North Florida Medical Legal Partnership, a division of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, Inc., has advised Congress that adopting a child support cooperation requirement to determine eligibility for SNAP benefits endangers child health. Florida is one of only six states in the country that has already adopted this misguided approach, and JALA has asked Congress to learn from Florida's mistakes, as opposed to forcing bad policy on the rest of the nation.

Florida's decision to adopt the option creates undue burden on single parent households already under a tremendous amount of stress and in need of access to the most basic of life's necessities: FOOD.

**SNAP Benefits Summary:**

1. SNAP is a vital program that helps 1 in 8 Americans afford an adequate diet.
2. It reduces food insecurity and keeps millions out of poverty.
3. Children who participate in SNAP have improved health and educational outcomes over the course of their lives.
4. Florida's decision to elect the SNAP child support cooperation requirements does not result in increased child support to vulnerable low income families. It instead deters otherwise eligible parents and children from accessing critical food assistance.

JALA's Managing Attorney for the Northeast Florida Medical Legal Partnership, Katy DeBriere, shares her personal experience in working with low-income families and the direct relationship it has to the health of children:

*"I manage a medical legal partnership with pediatric providers located in the Jacksonville, Florida community, including Wolfson Children's Hospital and Nemours Children's Specialty Care. I work daily with social worker aid to address the needs of low income patients in order to produce better health outcomes.*

*SNAP advocacy plays an important role in my job; it is a short line from food security to better health outcomes. In that advocacy, the healthcare providers and I find that Florida's child support cooperation requirements in SNAP eligibility pose significant barriers to connecting children and families to adequate and healthy food.*

*Florida's child support cooperation requirements in SNAP make applications for benefits intimidating or impractical for custodial households."*

## **Case Study**

A social worker recently gave an example of a mother of three who decided to not apply for SNAP benefits because the paternal grandmother provided them a place to live. The mother knew that, if she initiated child support enforcement proceedings against the father, she and her children would be kicked out of the only affordable housing they could access. **The mother had to choose between adequate nutrition or a safe place to live.**

JALA and the NFMLP urge Congress to adopt common-sense guidelines for SNAP instead of following Florida's harmful example.

### **About Jacksonville Area Legal Aid:**

The mission of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, Inc. is to obtain and provide high quality legal assistance to low income and other special need groups and to stimulate and empower groups of poor people to accomplish energetic and affirmative advocacy, all to alleviate the circumstances, incidents and causes of poverty. Donate at [www.JaxLegalAid.org](http://www.JaxLegalAid.org).

### **About Northeast Florida Medical Legal Partnership:**

The NFMLP is part of a nationwide network of projects in which professionals from the medical and legal communities combine resources to produce outcomes for low-income and vulnerable patients (children and adults) that positively impact their health and ability to thrive.

###