



Fraud's a SNAP

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This may shock you . . . or not . . . but independent reporters led by Nick Shirley have [confirmed](#) that food-stamp fraud is rampant. At least it is in the streets of Seattle. Their work supplements a police investigation [reported](#) in October 2025.

One scheme involves fraudsters approaching “groups of unsheltered individuals . . . who had an EBT [electronic benefits transfer card] with money on it,” a Seattle police captain reported last year. They would “then take that person to a store with a shopping list.”

The fraudsters keep the goods for resale while paying the original card holder half the card value in cash. Alternatively, the fraudsters buy EBT cards at half-price directly from card holders.

Sometimes fraudsters let drug dealers know which

persons living on the street have just gotten cash for their cards. The dealers then swarm into a homeless camps to sell their wares.

Shirley's work shows that although police arrests of eleven of the scammers made a dent, the scams still go on — in Seattle and doubtless many other cities.

He found that local store clerks proved willing to adjust food prices charged to match the balance on an EBT card, say \$120. Then, if all goes “well,” the clerk and the fraudster presumably split the take.

Shirley's [video](#) doesn't document the last part of the process because, to avoid being complicit in the scam, he kept entering a false PIN.

Welfare fraud is, apparently, easy to perpetrate, hard to patrol.

It used to be understood that the only way to distribute general benefits to the poor was to refuse to make it easy to receive, and to administer such programs as locally as possible. Incentives for bureaucrats and disincentives for abusers must always be made *painfully* clear. And punishments *swift*.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.