

April 17, 2018

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson,

For decades, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has helped ensure that vulnerable, low-income people in our nation can put food on the table. We urge Congress to continue the longstanding bipartisan commitment to protect and strengthen SNAP, specifically by opposing proposals to restrict eligibility, reduce benefits, cap or reduce funding, or make harmful structural changes in the upcoming Farm Bill.

In 2015, approximately 9.8 million Americans over the age of 60 faced the threat of hunger.¹ Food insecure seniors experience lower nutritional intakes and are more likely to suffer from diabetes, depression, limitations in activities of daily living (ADLs), high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, heart attacks, gum disease, and asthma.² Consequently, these increased healthcare costs are directly passed on to taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid.

In the 2016 fiscal year, 12% of all SNAP participants were at or over the age of 60. Approximately 4.7 million households receiving SNAP had elderly individuals, and 3.86 million elderly adults living alone received SNAP. The typical elderly household (defined as having at least one eligible individual aged 60 or older) enrolled in SNAP has an annual income of nearly \$11,000. The average monthly benefit for a senior living alone is \$106 per month, less than \$4 per day in benefits.³ This modest benefit helps seniors who too often are forced to choose between paying for food, medicine, rent, heat, or other daily costs. However, older Americans who qualify for SNAP are significantly less likely to participate in the program than other demographic groups. Three out of five seniors who qualify for this assistance do not even apply.

This Committee's recent proposals would limit access and reduce benefits, and not only would they harm older adults, but also their families, caregivers and, ultimately, all taxpayers.

Narrowed time limits and expanded work requirements: Expanding work requirements to include older adults aged 50 to 59 and narrowing time limits on the receipt of SNAP benefits for those out of work is a policy that undermines the goals of SNAP. Older workers face a wide array of challenges, including discrimination, struggles with health and ability, and caregiving responsibilities—not only for children, but also for even older, aging parents— that might keep them out of the workforce.⁴ Data from the

¹ Ziliak, James P. and Gundersen, Craig. *The State of Senior Hunger in America 2015: An Annual Report*. 2017. <http://nfesh.org/wp-content/uploads/state-of-senior-hunger-2015-annual-report.pdf>

² Feeding America and the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger. *Spotlight on Senior Health: Adverse Outcomes of Food Insecure Older Americans*. 2015. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research/or-spotlight-on-senior-health-executive-summary.pdf>

³ United States Department of Agriculture. *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2016*. 2017. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2016.pdf>

⁴ Senate Special Committee on Aging. *America's Aging Workforce: Opportunities and Challenges*. 2017. <https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Aging%20Workforce%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that in 2017, the average unemployed jobseeker between the ages of 45-54 was unemployed for 31.2 weeks. Between the ages of 55 to 64, that average number of weeks spent seeking employment went up to 36.6 weeks.⁵ These durations are all well above the current 3-month time limit cap on benefits for ABAWDs.

Another way this bill's stringent work requirements fall short of reflecting the reality that families face is that it fails to recognize the full breadth of caregiving responsibilities Americans assume. This includes providing uncompensated care to children over the age of 6, regardless of whether they have disabilities or illnesses, as well as aging parents, whose health and independence challenges go far beyond the shortsighted label of "incapacitated".⁶

Redirected investments will be inadequate to meet training needs: Investing the "savings" in employment and training will still leave funding wholly inadequate to provide training services to the new population subject to these rules. Federal workforce development programs, including the only one targeted to low-income older workers, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), have been subject to years of disinvestment and the proposed new resources are inadequate to address the significant barriers to employment of those who cannot find work, particularly with a living wage, particularly at the scale proposed by this legislation.

Small increases in the bill will not counter lost benefits: Increasing the asset limit and continuing categorical eligibility for the elderly up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Line acknowledges that older adults with modest savings struggle with food insecurity. However, limiting the flexibility given to states will increase administrative burdens and costs on state and local agencies. Additionally, given the high level of stigma already associated with SNAP in the older population discourages participation, even more onerous work requirements on the population up to 59 might have a negative effect on elderly participation in SNAP simply through program perception.⁷

We call on you to reconsider these proposals that would weaken SNAP's structure and limit access for people of all ages.

Despite the Committee's obvious attempt to protect, to an extent, Americans over 60, we must not forget that healthy aging begins well before one reaches the age of 60.

Sincerely,

AARP

AFSCME

Alliance for Retired Americans

American Foundation for the Blind

American Society on Aging

Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historical Black Colleges and Universities

B'nai B'rith International

Center for Medicare Advocacy

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Household Data Annual Averages: 2017*. 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat31.pdf>

⁶ Rainville, Chuck, Laura Skufca, and Laura Mehegan. *Family Caregiving and Out-of-Pocket Costs: 2016 Report*. Washington, DC: AARP Research, November 2016. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00138.001>

⁷ National Council on Aging. *An End To Stigma: Challenging the Stigmatization of Public Assistance Among Older Adults and People With Disabilities*. 2016. <https://www.ncoa.org/wp-content/uploads/An-End-to-Stigma-Issue-Brief-NCOA.pdf>

Fair Food Network
Feeding America
Hunger Free America
The Jewish Federations of North America
Justice in Aging
LeadingAge
Lutheran Services in America
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Meals on Wheels America
Medicare Rights Center
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Council on Aging
National CSFP Association
National Recreation and Park Association
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
Society of St. Andrew
Union for Reform Judaism
Volunteers of America
Wholesome Wave
WhyHunger
Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)

cc: Members of the House Committee on Agriculture