

November 12, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
328A Russell Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
328A Russell Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Lucas, and Ranking Members Cochran and Peterson:

With over one in five children at risk of hunger and one in three overweight or obese, we strongly urge you to protect SNAP and other nutrition programs in the farm bill. The proposed deep funding cuts and harmful policy changes to SNAP would place millions of our most vulnerable children at greater risk of hunger and poor health outcomes. Instead we ask you to protect and strengthen SNAP, SNAP-Ed, FFVP, and TEFAP in the final farm bill conference report.

While child hunger was a significant problem before the recession, the recession has made the problem dramatically worse. The number of children who live in food insecure households is 28 percent higher today than it was before the recession, increasing from 12.4 million in 2007 to 15.9 million in 2012. Food insecure children struggle to thrive academically. They have trouble focusing in school and are 1.4 times as likely to repeat a grade. They are also more likely to get sick and 30 percent more likely to have a history of hospitalization.

Federal nutrition programs safeguard the well-being of America's most vulnerable children by reducing hunger and increasing access to high-quality, nutritious foods. That is why we are strongly opposed to the cuts to SNAP included in the Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act (H.R. 3102). Proposed SNAP eligibility changes would erect new participation barriers that would prevent millions of seniors, children and families from accessing food assistance.

H.R. 3102 would cut nearly \$40 billion from SNAP, causing 4 million participants to lose benefits entirely and 850,000 households to have their food assistance cut by an average \$90 per month. Additionally, 210,000 children would lose access to free school meals because their enrollment is linked to their family's SNAP participation. At the same time, the bill would cut SNAP nutrition education funding that helps families maximize nutrition on a limited food budget. Many schools also use nutrition education to promote healthy food choices and regular physical activity at in-school and out-of-school settings.

The House farm bill would also reward states for cutting participants off of SNAP if they cannot find a job or a job training program, including families with children. This provision is especially concerning for families with young children for whom employment is contingent upon access to affordable child care. Historically, parents with children have been exempt from SNAP work requirements, but under this provision only parents with children under one year of age would be exempt. What is worse, no funds are provided to expand the limited number of job training slots available. At a time when unemployment remains high and there are three job seekers for every job opening, this provision would reward states with 50 percent of any SNAP savings generated from reduced caseloads that they could spend on anything they choose.

Nearly half of all SNAP participants are children. Many of our most vulnerable children would be impacted by these cuts, losing vital nutrition assistance and placing them at greater risk of poor health, and we urge you to protect SNAP from funding cuts and harmful policy changes.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) promotes nutrition by providing millions of low-income children in elementary schools with a fresh fruit or vegetable snack at school every day. This successful program has been shown to increase students' average fruit and vegetable consumption by 15 percent in participating schools without increasing total caloric intake, suggesting that increased fruit and vegetable consumption replaced the consumption of other less nutrient dense foods. We urge you to maintain current funding for FFVP and protect the integrity of the program to ensure that school children are provided with a fresh fruit or vegetable snack.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides a steady stream of nutritious USDA commodities for distribution through food banks to local pantries, kitchens, and shelters. The Feeding America national network of food banks serves 14 million children annually, 3 million age five and younger. In addition to providing groceries to families with children, food banks serve children through school pantries, weekend Backpack programs, and summer and afterschool snack programs. We urge you to support the House funding increase of \$300 million for TEFAP.

Farm bill nutrition programs like SNAP, SNAP-Ed, FFVP, and TEFAP provide critical nutrition to our most vulnerable low-income children. As a partner in the fight against hunger and childhood obesity, the organizations listed below representing the children's community strongly urges you to reject any cuts to nutrition assistance programs and to safeguard the programs' current levels of benefits, eligibility, and essential services.

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance  
Alliance for Children and Families  
American Commodity Distribution Association  
American Federation of Teachers  
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's Health Fund

CLASP  
Fair Food Network  
Fair Share  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)  
Generations United  
Healthy Teen Network  
LEAnet, a national network of local education agencies  
Malcolm X Center for Self Determination  
MomsRising  
National Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds  
National Association of County Human Services Administrators  
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)  
National Association for the Education of Young Children  
National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)  
National Crittenton Foundation  
National Education Association  
National Indian Child Welfare Association  
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty  
National Parent Teacher Association  
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Promise the Children  
Ray Helfer Society  
RESULTS: Power to End Poverty  
Save the Children  
Share our Strength  
SocioEnergetics Foundation  
United Neighborhood Centers of America  
ZERO TO THREE

Cc: Members of Farm Bill Conference Committee