

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