



June 19, 2017

Representative Danny Davis
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Gwen Moore
United State House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative James Langevin
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Bobby Rush
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Davis, Representative Moore, Representative Langevin, and Representative Rush:

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children’s advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal budget and policy decisions, I am writing to thank you for your leadership in introducing H.R. 2236, the Foster and Homeless Youth Food Security Act of 2017.

As an organization committed to ensuring the economic security of foster and homeless youth in the U.S., we applaud efforts to assure that students in higher education who are transitioning out of the foster system or are experiencing homelessness will not face food insecurity as a result of pursuing their education.

As foster and homeless youth enter adulthood, many are quickly faced with the burdens of independent living without a permanent family to lean on for financial help and guidance. Former foster youth who pursue higher education have a more difficult time financing their education on top of basic economic burdens, making them especially susceptible to hardship like food insecurity, according to a policy study by the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

According to a report from the Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness, homeless students were over twice as likely to go to school hungry than their housed peers. This reality makes it imperative that these vulnerable populations have access to support from social safety net programs. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical service for ensuring that former foster and homeless youth can focus on their studies, and not on where their next meal will come from.

However, foster and unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults are still subject to burdensome requirements under SNAP, despite their increased vulnerability in the absence of a supportive family. As independent adults, foster and homeless youth enrolled in higher education are required to work at least 20 hours per week on top of their college classes to qualify for continuous SNAP coverage, unless they meet certain criteria. Otherwise, they are subject to a 3-month time limit without working before they lose benefits.

H.R. 2236 will allow for specific exemptions explicitly for foster and homeless youth who are enrolled at least half-time in an institution of higher education. It will exempt them from the work requirement and other eligibility criteria as long as they are pursuing their education. These young people are working hard towards their future success, and should not have to worry about food insecurity. This bill will ensure that foster youth won’t have to face the physical and mental burdens of hunger as they work to improve their lives.

We are grateful for your leadership in making children and families a legislative priority, and we look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of children and youth.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley
President