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April 10, 2018

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway  
Chairman  
U.S House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
328 A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
1305 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
328 A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Chairman Roberts & Ranking Member Stabenow:

On behalf of our members and all Americans age 50 and older, I am writing to express AARP's priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill reauthorization. AARP with its nearly 38 million members in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical part of the safety net available to low-income families including older Americans and people with disabilities. It is the nation's largest federal domestic nutrition assistance program, and provides nearly 43 million Americans with critical support to purchase food for themselves and their families. According to a 2015 research study from the AARP Foundation—the charitable arm of AARP serving low-income older adults—approximately 10 million adults over the age of 50 struggle with food insecurity.

AARP is deeply concerned about the issue of food insecurity, particularly the impact it has on the health of older adults. In addition to combating food insecurity, SNAP also plays a key role in the health and well-being of the millions of Americans who depend

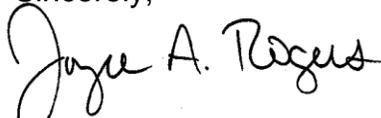
on the program. For older adults, the negative consequences of food insecurity are dire; seniors struggling with food insecurity are over twice as likely to report being in poor health. Compared to food-secure seniors, those facing food insecurity are 53 percent more likely to die of a heart attack, 40 percent more likely to have congestive heart failure, 52 percent more likely to develop asthma and are 60 percent more likely to suffer from depression.<sup>i</sup>

One recent study that showed how healthcare and food insecurity causes are inexorably linked found the risk for hospital admissions for low blood sugar spiked 27 percent in the last week of the month as compared to the first week of the month when food and SNAP budgets of low-income populations have often been exhausted.<sup>ii</sup> By freeing up household resources otherwise needed for food costs, SNAP benefits play a key role in helping people afford basic necessities like housing and utility expenses. As the committee moves forward in constructing the bill, AARP recommends that the bill protect and strengthen SNAP -- not add new barriers -- and expand opportunities for qualifying households to have access this critical program. Specifically we urge you to:

- Refrain from making benefit cuts to SNAP. We urge you to protect the program's ability to carry out its important mission and reject making any structural changes that would weaken SNAP's ability to respond to increased needs due to changes in the economy;
- Reject any expansion to the law's work requirements under SNAP including any new requirements on workers age 50+ who typically take longer than younger workers to find new permanent employment after being unemployed;
- Continue to protect categorical eligibility, as was done in the last farm bill -- it is essential to improving access to SNAP for low-income Americans of all ages;<sup>iii</sup>
- Invest in community-based initiatives to assist older adults and other vulnerable populations in better managing chronic conditions through nutrition and physical activity;
- Allow grandparent and other non-parent caregivers to apply for benefits on behalf of the children in their care; and
- Provide additional incentives to states to undertake reforms to expand SNAP; eligibility for low-income households, such as eliminating asset tests for low-income older households and/or expanding income and resource deductions.

As the debate continues, we urge you to work together on a bipartisan basis to ensure that the final package includes these important policies that are critical for low-income older adults. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me, or have your staff contact Daniel R. Wilson on our Government Affairs staff at 202-434-7943.

Sincerely,



Joyce Rogers

Senior Vice President, Government Affairs

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- <sup>i</sup> Feeding America. *Spotlight on Senior Health: Adverse Health Outcomes of Food Insecure Older Americans* <http://www.feedingamerica.org>
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/33/1/116.full.pdf+html>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42054.pdf>